NEW

SPECIAL CLASSIC ROCK EDITION

THE BLUES COLLECTION

CLASSIC STORIES of the BLUES GREATS

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PETER GREEN · STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN · GARY MOORE · BUDDY GUY

AND JOE BONAMASSA · HOWLIN' WOLF · WALTER TROUT · ZZ TOP · DR FEELGOOD

PLUS
THE GREATEST LIVE ALBUMS
HOW THE BLUES GOT HEAVY

BUYER'S GUIDES TO
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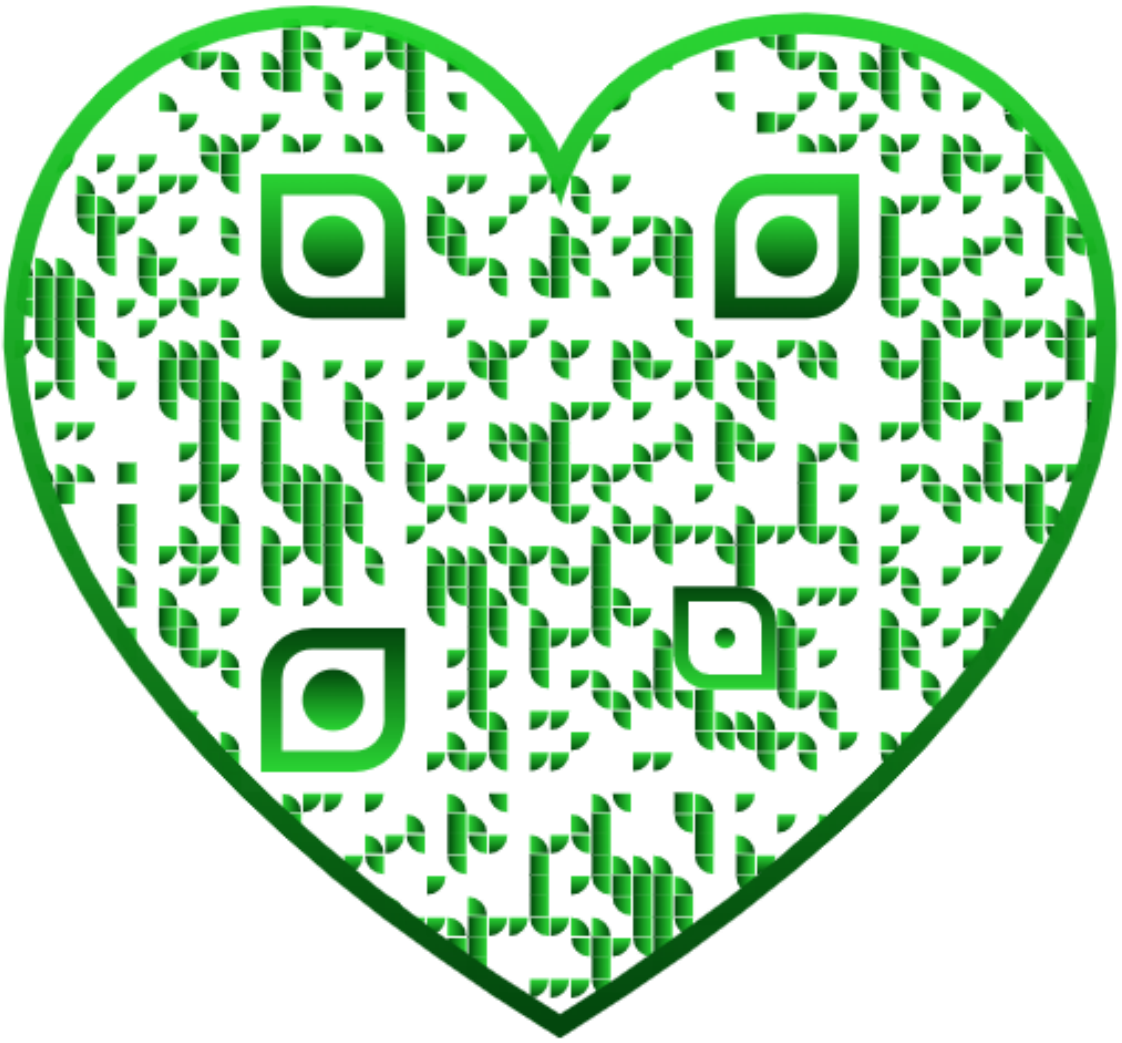

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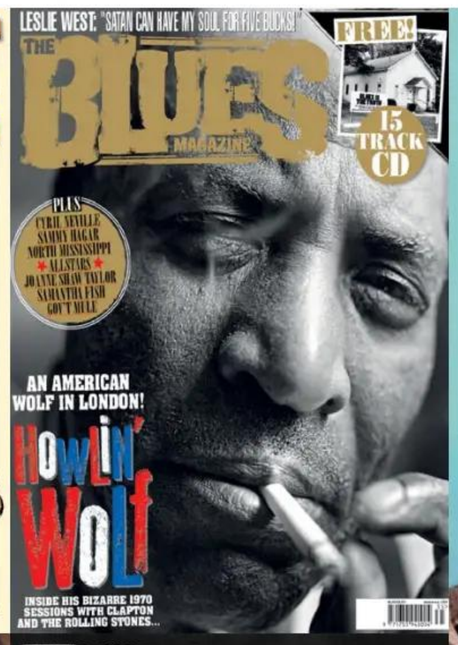

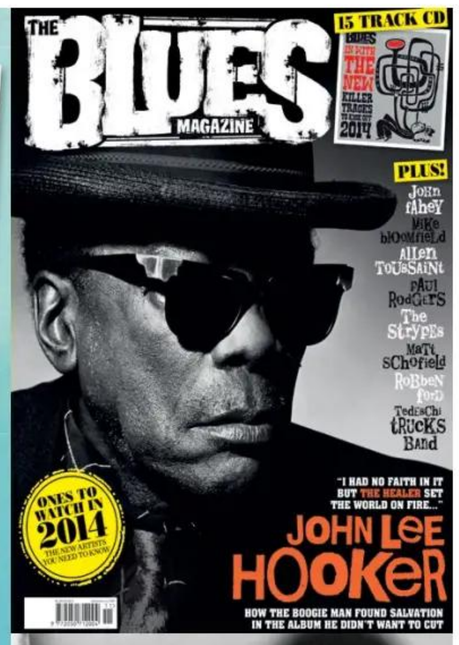

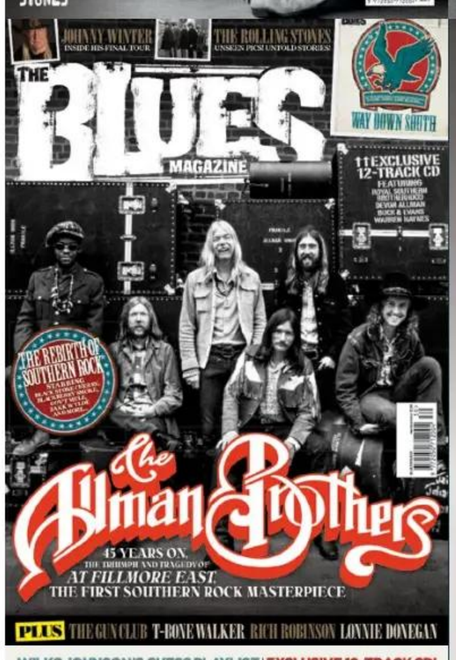

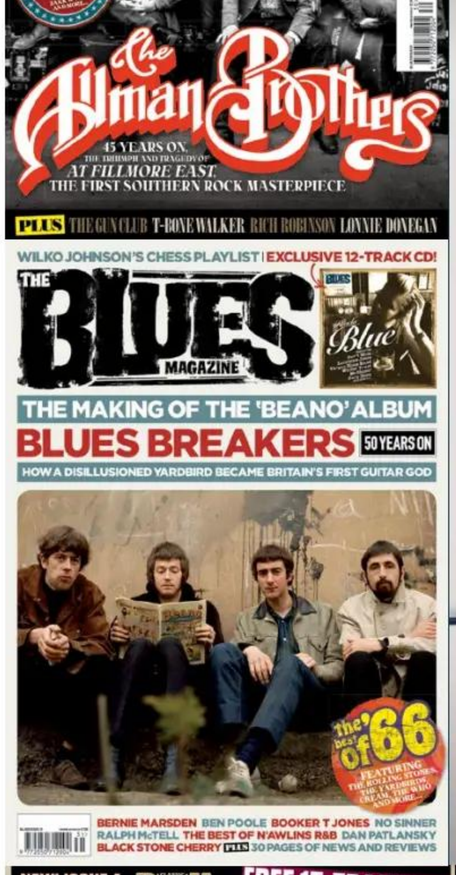

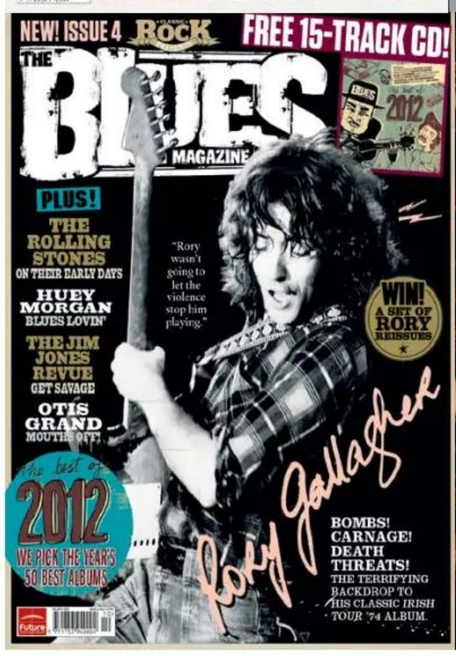

SPECIAL CLASSIC ROCK EDITION

THE BLUES COLLECTION

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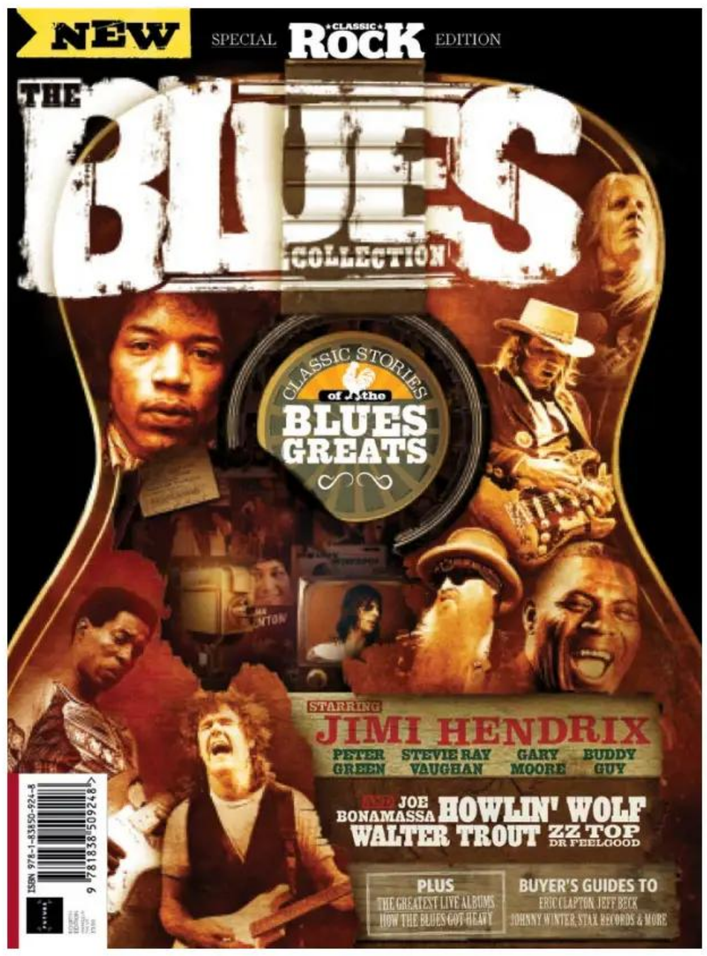

The Blues magazine started off as an offshoot of *Classic Rock* magazine in June 2012. *Classic Rock* had been covering blues rock artists for years, with the occasional feature on an original bluesman like Muddy or Wolf, but the burgeoning new scene made us wonder if blues needed it's own magazine. Sure, *Classic Rock* could cover Joe Bonamassa every now and again, but to also cover Walter Trout, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Jonny Lang, the Royal Southern Brotherhood, Joanne Shaw Taylor etc etc was going to take quite a few more pages.

The success of *Classic Rock*'s first-ever cover story with Joe Bonamassa gave us confidence that it could work. That story is included in this collection, as the story that gave birth to *The Blues* magazine. (It, and the story about Jimi's *Are You Experienced*, are the only stories here that weren't originally published in *The Blues* mag itself.)

The magazine ran from 2012 to 2016 under the editorship of Ed Mitchell (and special mention must be made here of Art Editor Steven Goldring and Dep Ed Emma Johnson).

What you have in your hands is a collection of some of the mag's finest moments – and there are many fine moments to choose from. There's great writing on – and some amazing photographs of – the genre's biggest stars: Stevie Ray Vaughan, Gary Moore, ZZ Top, Howlin' Wolf… And their stories and voices resonate still – honest, authentic, talented, aware, musical….

You can always tell *real* music fans. It doesn't matter what got them into music in the first place, their natural love and thirst for fresh sounds and greater understanding turns them into time travellers. They may be a teenage guitarist who picked up a Telecaster because of Green Day, but they soon read that Green Day reference The Clash, and that sends them backwards, where they learn that the Clash liked The Who and The Who liked Mose Allison and R&B and… everything ends up at the blues.

From the Delta to the guitar shops of London's iconic Denmark Street, these are just some of its stories…

Scott Rowley,
Editor In Chief

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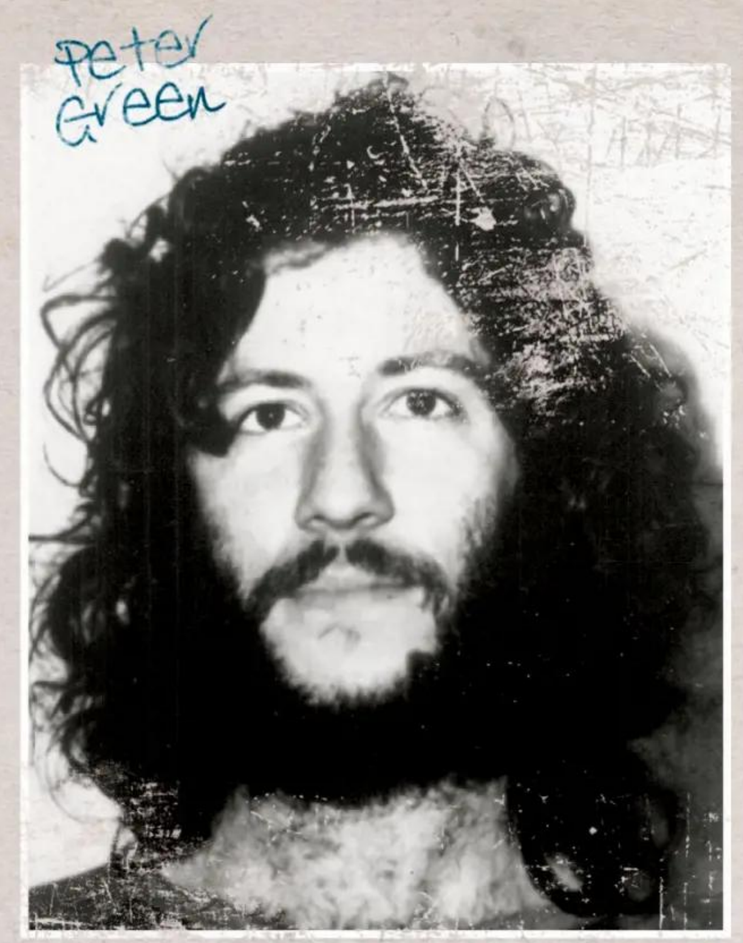

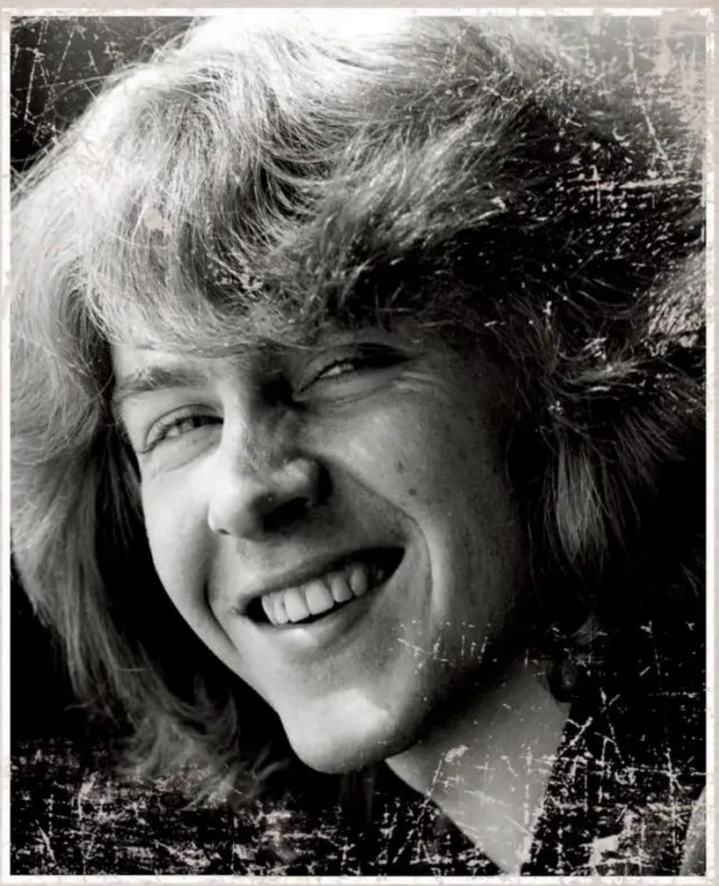

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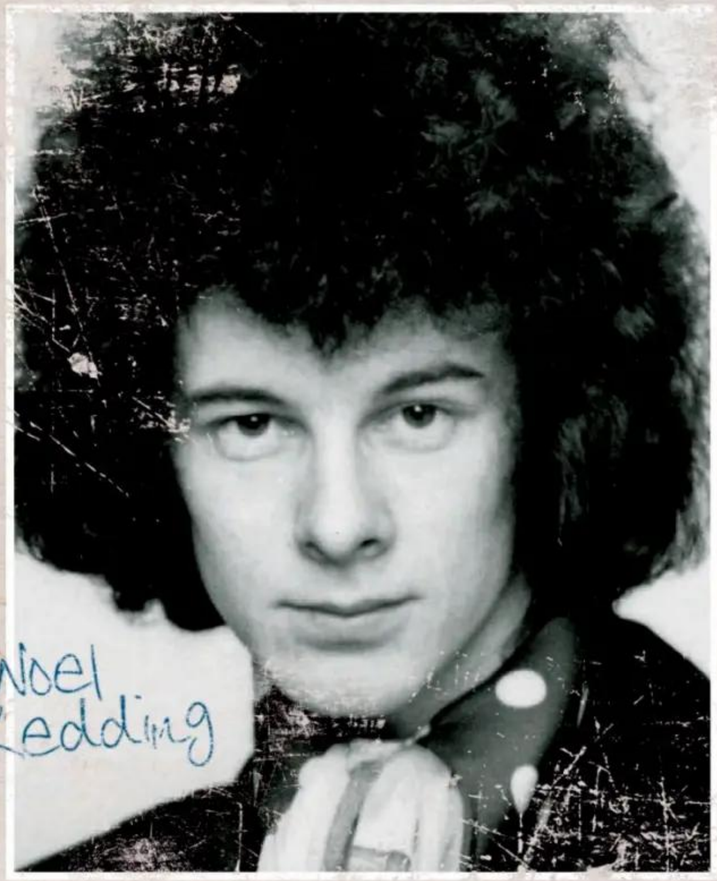

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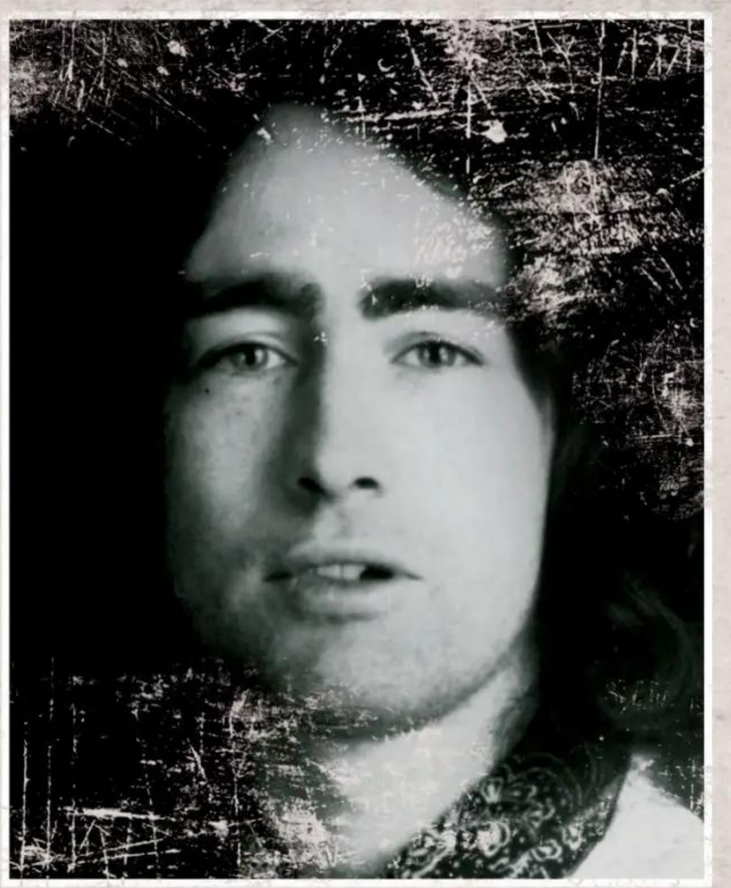
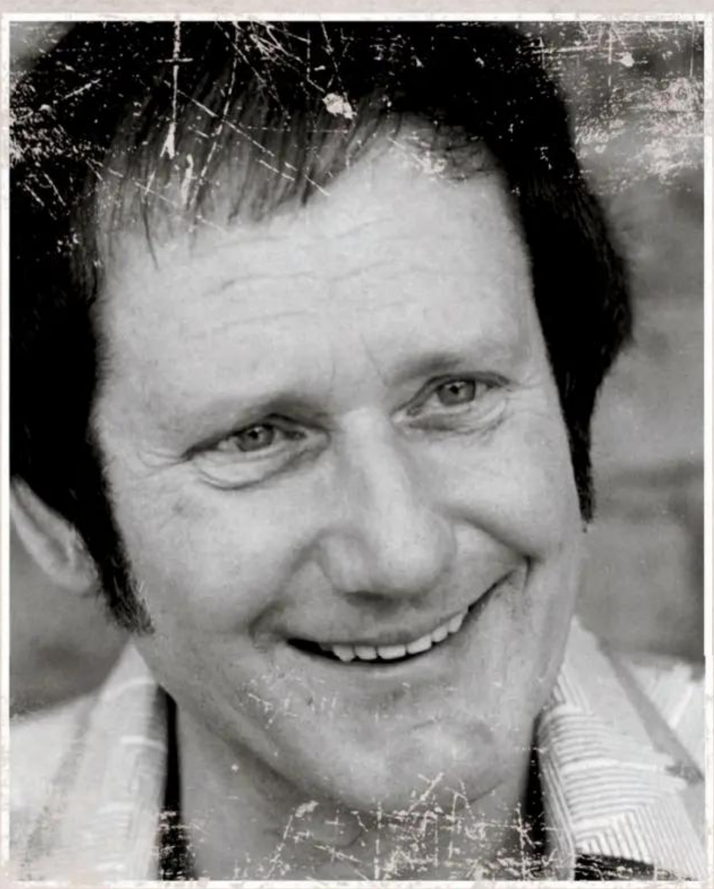


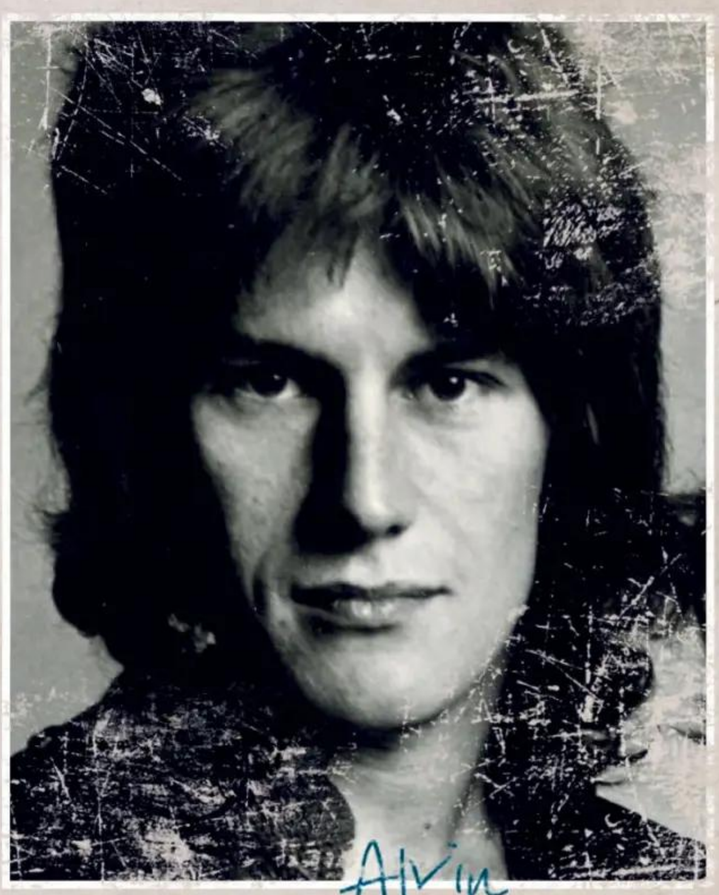
Paul Rodgers

Jimmy Page

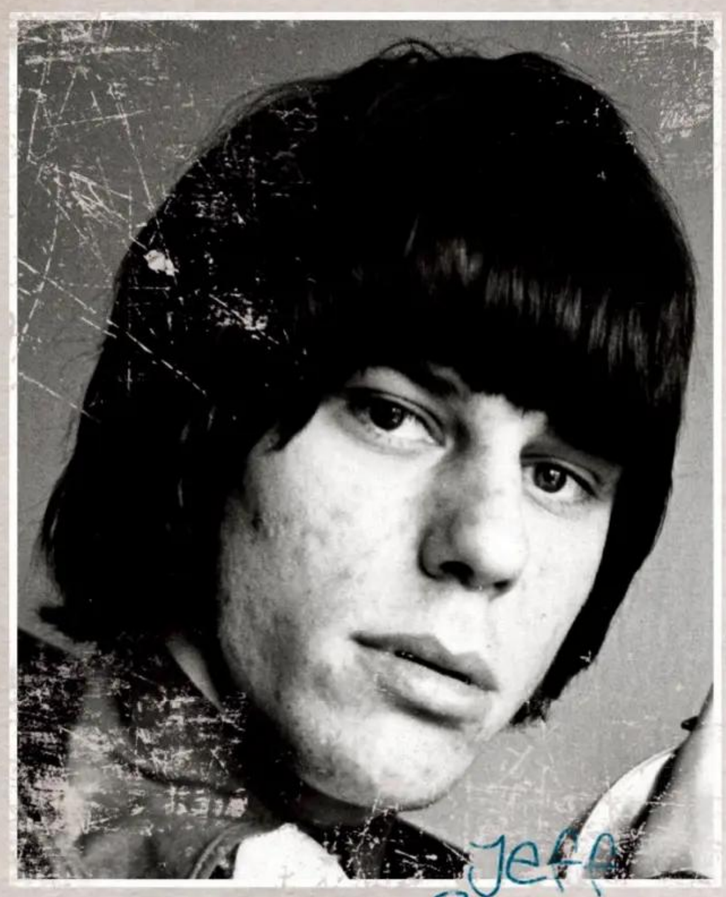
Robert Plant



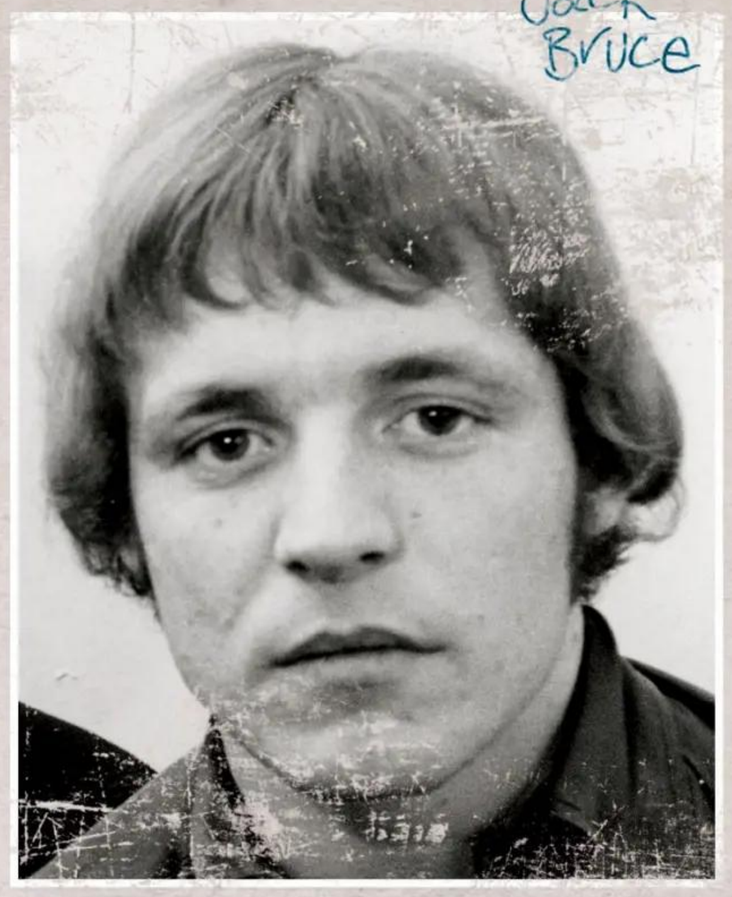
Jim Marshall

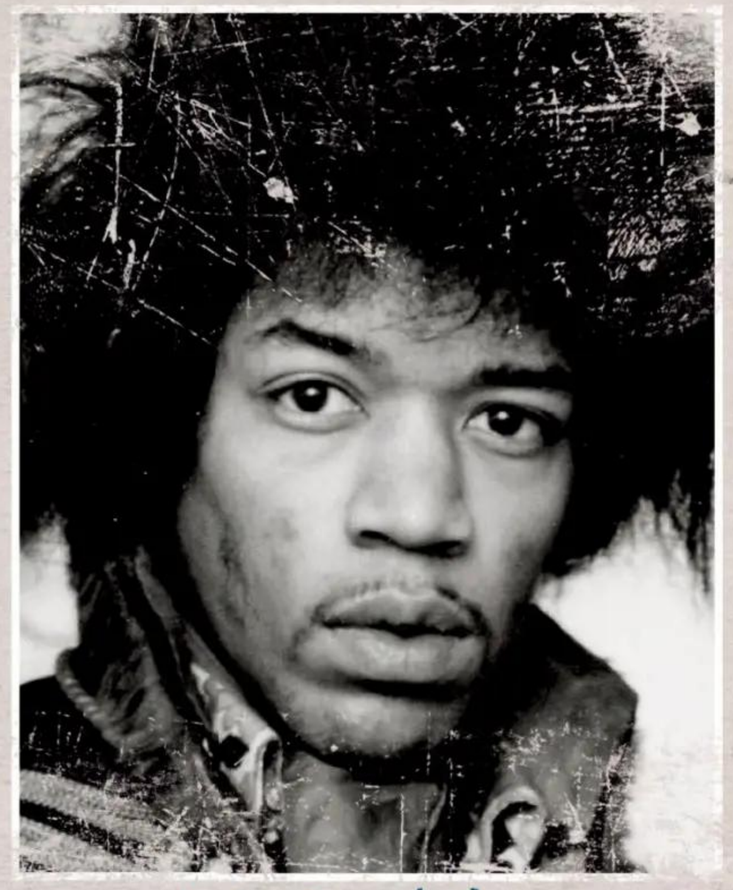


Alvin Lee



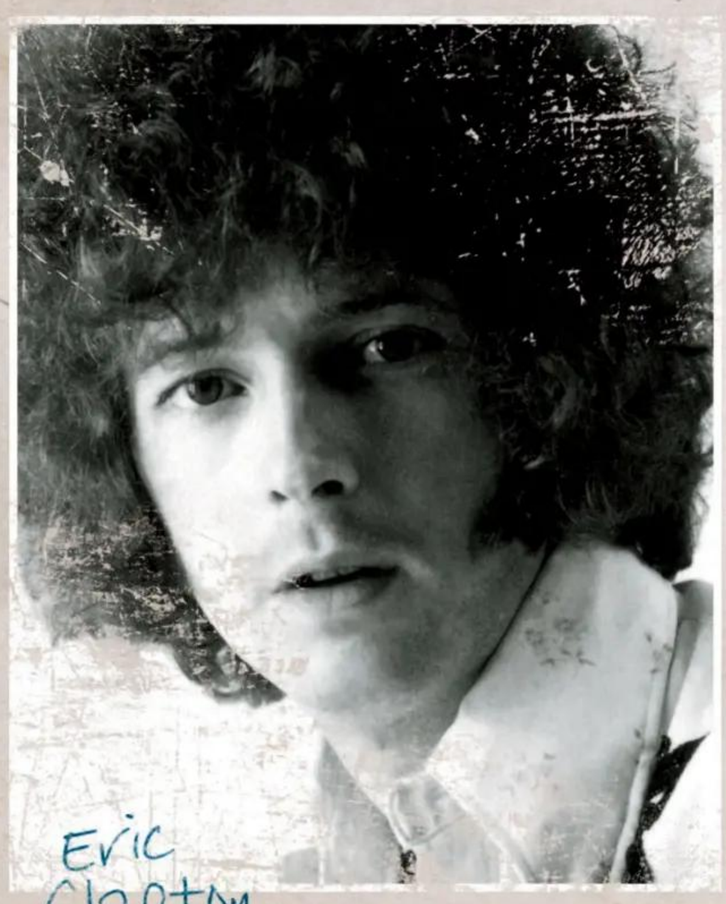
Jeff Beck



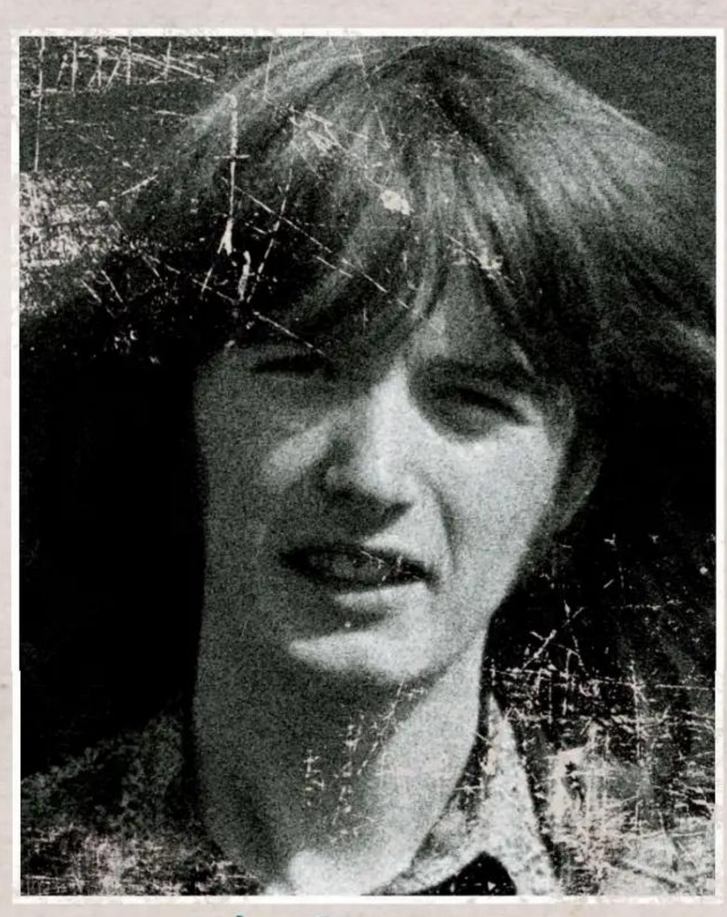


Jimi Hendrix

THE BIRTH OF HEAVY BLUES



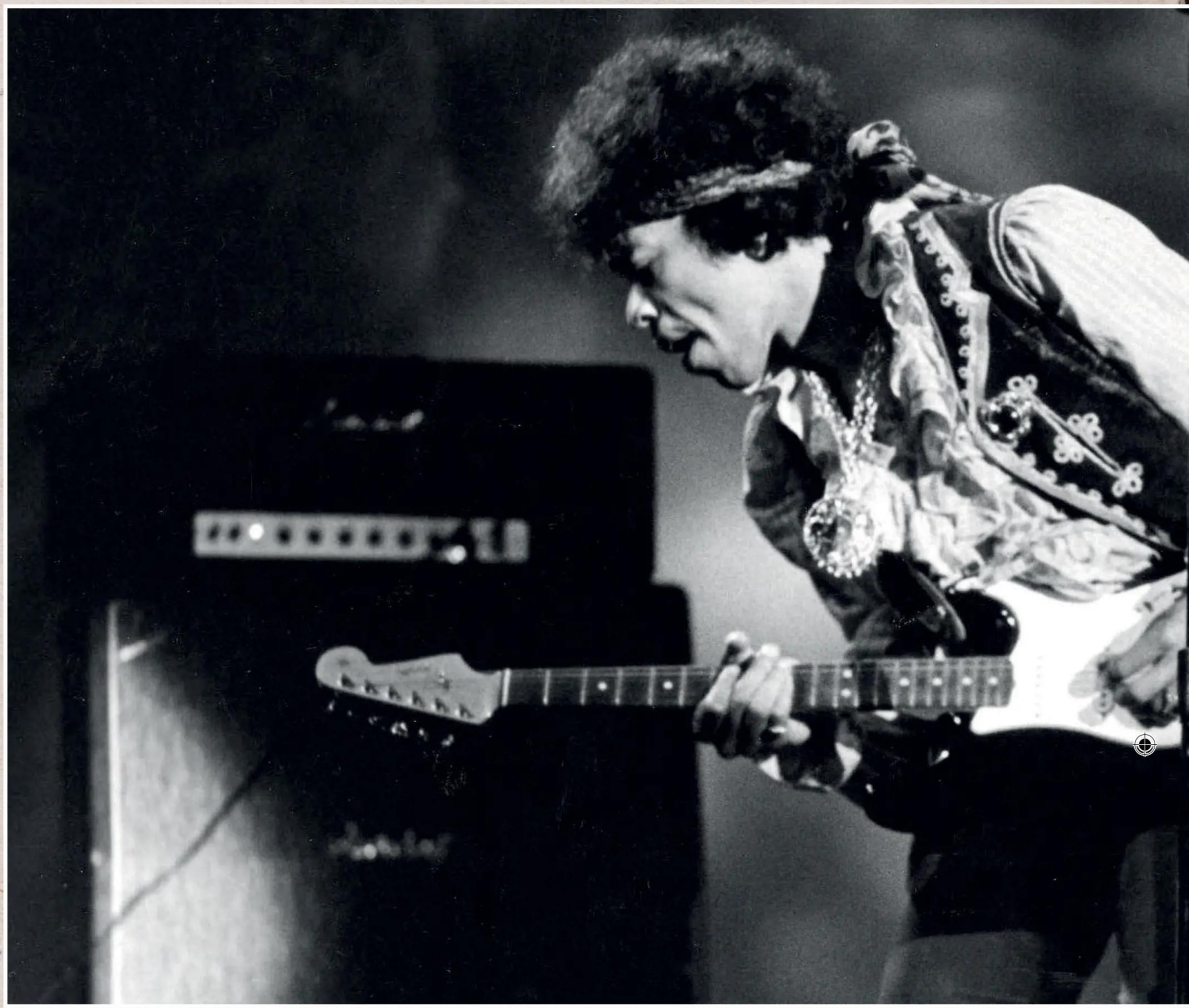
Eric Clapton



Kim Simmonds

When Jimi Hendrix arrived in London in 1966 he blew the minds of the British rock elite including Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck. Soon, however, they would follow his lead and develop an explosive new form of electric blues...

Words: **Johnny Black**



Like all the great overnight sensations, Jimi Hendrix took years to get off the ground. His was a long road to fame: from the little boy who, in 1958, used his beat-up guitar to imitate TV cartoon sound effects, to the 1964 guitar-slinger who hired out his talents to Little Richard, The Isley Brothers and others, to the outlandish psychedelic six-string shaman who flew into London in late 1966.

However, within weeks of Hendrix being launched to the Big Smoke's goggle-eyed media at The Bag O'Nails club on Friday November 25, 1966, virtually every major British blues guitarist found himself rethinking his musical direction. Inevitably, the purists would continue to recycle the past and the unimaginative would slavishly emulate Hendrix, but a handful of inspired innovators would choose to fashion their own unique styles until, out of that seething maelstrom of creativity, heavy blues would be born.

1966, NOVEMBER 25

Having created a buzz with a handful of small-venue appearances, including the now legendary jam with Cream at Regent Street Polytechnic which had left Eric Clapton gobsmacked at his prowess, Jimi Hendrix was officially launched with a showcase gig in The Bag O'Nails, a tiny but influential music biz Mecca in London's Soho. As well as key journalists invited by Hendrix's manager Chas Chandler, a Bag O'Nails appearance ensured that the fledgeling Jimi Hendrix Experience would be seen by the venue's regular clientele, which included Paul McCartney, The Who, Eric Burdon and others.

JOHN MAYALL (The Bluesbreakers): When Jimi first came to England, Chas Chandler had put the word out that he'd found this phenomenal guitar player in New York, and he could play the guitar behind his head and with his teeth and everything. The buzz was out before Jimi had even been seen here, so people were anticipating his performance, and he more than lived up to what we were expecting.

TERRY REID (rock vocalist): We were all hanging out at The Bag O'Nails: Keith, Mick Jagger. Brian [Jones] comes skipping through, like, all happy about something. Paul McCartney walks in. Jeff Beck walks in. Jimmy Page. *[Ed's note: Page denies having been there.]* I thought, "What's this? A bloody convention or something?"

Here comes Jim, one of his military jackets, hair all over the place, pulls out this left-handed Stratocaster, beat to hell, looks like he's been chopping wood with it.

And he gets up, all soft-spoken. And all of a sudden, "WHOOOR-RRAAAWWRR!" And he breaks into *Wild Thing*, and it was all over. There were guitar players weeping. They had to mop the floor up. He was piling it on, solo after solo. I could see everyone's fillings falling out. When he finished, it was silence. Nobody knew what to do. Everybody was dumbstruck, completely in shock.

KEITH ALTHAM (journalist, NME): Jimi was almost too much, to be absolutely honest. He

GETTY x2, REX x2

The icon in action: Jimi with Strat and Marshall stack.

"He breaks into *Wild Thing* and it was all over. Guitar players were weeping. They had to mop the floor up."

was overwhelming in that small space. You knew something special was going on, you knew the guy was obviously a brilliant guitarist but it was very difficult to take in as a journalist.

JEFF BECK: The thing I noticed was not only his amazing blues but his physical assault on the guitar. His actions were all of one accord, an explosive package. Me, Eric and Jimmy, we were cursed because we were from Surrey. We all looked like we'd walked out of a Burton's shop window. He hit me like an earthquake when he arrived. I had to think long and hard about what I did next.

MICK JAGGER: I loved Jimi Hendrix from the beginning. The moment I saw him, I thought he was fantastic. I was an instant convert. Mr. Jimi Hendrix is the best thing I've ever seen. It was exciting, sexy, interesting. He didn't have a very good voice but made up for it with his guitar.

For almost half a decade, Hendrix had criss-crossed America, honing his talents as a sideman and studio guitarist, ratcheting up credits with Little Richard, The Isley Brothers, Sam Cooke and many others. His was an impressive résumé, but fame and fortune hardly seemed any closer in 1966 than they did at the start of the decade.

In the autumn of 1966, Chas Chandler, previously best-known as the bassist for The Animals, had 'discovered' Hendrix playing in a Greenwich Village club during a night out in New York and immediately decided to bring him to the UK. Chandler's instincts were absolutely right. Not only would Hendrix's musicianship and image make him stand out from London's axe elite, but had he remained in America, he would probably never have got his head above water.

JOHN LEE HOOKER: Eric Clapton, John Mayall and all those other people over in England made the blues a big thing. In the States, people didn't want to know.

TONY GARLAND (assistant to Chas Chandler): White America was listening to Doris Day. Black American music got nowhere near white AM radio. Jimi was too white for black radio. Here, there were a lot of white guys listening to blues from America and wanting to sound like their heroes.

STEPHEN DALE PETIT (contemporary blues guitarist/genre expert): The British contribution to the blues is equal, in my eyes, to what Robert Johnson or Blind Lemon Jefferson did – all of those guys through to Muddy Waters. I think it's a certainty that without the British blues boom, the music would not have anything remotely like the profile it does. Remember too that when Chas invited Jimi to London, Jimi did not ask about money or contracts. He asked if Chas would introduce him to Beck and Clapton.

Using his extensive contacts network, Chandler had engineered a huge profile for Hendrix since the day he arrived in London, but from November 1966 he shifted into overdrive. In the next two months, Jimi would play at The Marquee, The Cromwellian, Blaises, The Speakeasy and elsewhere, with London's rock elite turning out regularly to hear him. Any muso who hadn't heard of Hendrix after The Bag O'Nails launch would know him now, and already his influence was being seen as well as heard. Two weeks after The Bag O'Nails, when Cream appeared at The Marquee Club, Clapton was sporting a frizzy perm and he left his guitar feeding back against the amp, just as he'd seen Jimi do.

Unsung six-string heroes

Six overlooked pioneers of blues-rock guitar.

LES PAUL

The man born Lester William Polsfuss was a genius. This is the guy who developed multitrack recording (from seized Nazi technology, no less), inspired the construction of the solid-body Gibson guitar that carries his John Hancock, and built the first guitar effects units. He was a huge star in the 40s and 50s, releasing layered guitar classics like *How High The Moon* with his then wife Mary Ford. The heavy blues explosion wouldn't have happened without his hard graft.

SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

Sister Rosetta was the first rock guitar hero. Chuck Berry, Elvis sideman Scotty Moore and Hank Marvin of The Shadows might get the props as pioneers but she was cuttin' heads before any of them. She was playing rock'n'roll in the 40s, and she played electric guitar onstage – not hidden in some orchestra pit but slung round her neck. Listen to her rapid-fire licks on her 1945 hit *Strange Things Happening Every Day* and say you don't hear her influence on Led Zep's first album.

LINK WRAY

Amplifier distortion was regarded as a fault before this one-lunged half-Shawnee Native American proto-punk deliberately poked holes in his speakers to get a filthy guitar tone. He used it to spectacular effect on his '58 single *Rumble*, the heavy blues almost 10 years ahead of the curve, which was banned on some radio stations for 'potentially' inspiring teen violence. *Rumble* gave us the power chord, fired up Pete Townshend and is valued by Jimmy Page as a life-changing 45.

Unsung six-string heroes

The overlooked pioneers of blues-rock guitar (continued).

DICK DALE

Everyone knows Dick Dale's pulverising '62 beast *Miserlou*, featuring his staccato picking technique that became a staple of every rock guitarist's trick bag after the single's release. Dale was seeking the kind of stage volume that could weld eyeballs to the back of teenage skulls and he pushed Fender to make more powerful amps. The whole 'arsenal of loud amps driven by a Fender Stratocaster' thing would be adopted by a kid named Jimi just a few years later...

LONNIE DONEGAN

Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, Elvis and others might have sent a shiver of excitement through the bored kids of 50s Blighty, but it was The King Of Skiffle, Lonnie Donegan, who inspired them to form bands. He made skiffle look easy and pretty much all the British kids who would go on to deliver heavy blues cited Donegan as a catalyst. While he never received the riches he felt he deserved, he shaped the future of rock music more than any other Brit artist before The Beatles.

CLIFF GALLUP

If Jeff Beck's back catalogue were a crime scene then legendary Gene Vincent & His Blue Caps guitarist Cliff Gallup's dabs would be all over it. You can hear Gallup's jazz-inflected rockabilly licks in Beck's work from The Yardbirds and beyond. Gallup was an exceptional lead guitarist, as proved on Gretsch Duo Jet-fuelled tracks like *Race With The Devil* and *Be-Bop*-A-Lula – but he was modest and shunned the spotlight. He never knew the influence he had on the class of '67.

1966, LATE NOVEMBER
Hendrix jams at The Cromwellian with organist Brian Auger. This is reputedly the first gig at which Jimi played through Marshall equipment.
ANDY SUMMERS (guitarist with Zoot Money and The Police): He had a white Strat and, as I walked in, he had it in his mouth. He had a huge Afro and he had on a sort of buckskin jacket with fringes that were to the floor. Yeah, it was intense and it was really great. It kind of turned all the guitarists in London upside down.

1966, DECEMBER 13
The Jimi Hendrix Experience tape *Hey Joe* for popular TV show *Ready, Steady Go!* Watching is effects wizard Roger Mayer, who'd already built custom fuzz boxes for Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck, and would soon give Hendrix the Octavia octave-doubling device heard at the end of *Purple Haze*.
ROGER MAYER: I said, "Damn, this guy is incredible." He was the epitome of what any rock guitarist should be – we had no one of that calibre.

1966, DECEMBER 16
***Hey Joe* is released. It will peak at No.6 during its 11 weeks on the singles chart. Stephen Dale Petit makes the valid observation that, for a black man steeped in blues tradition, the marketing of Jimi's launch in the UK was as revolutionary as his music. "The idea that Hendrix was a psychedelic guitarist more than a blues guitarist was partly down to how he was packaged," reasons Petit.**
DAVE GREGORY (guitarist, XTC): I was 14 years old. I'd been playing guitar for about three months when I heard *Hey Joe*. I thought it was a dirge – a soul singer with a doom-laden backing chorus. When I finally got hold of the 45 some months later, I turned the disc over and found *Stone Free* on the B-side, which was another thing entirely – the wildest guitar playing I'd ever heard. I was so dazzled by his brilliance that I didn't immediately identify his playing as blues.
STEPHEN DALE PETIT: Psychedelia was the burgeoning trend and Hendrix in those flamboyant clothes was a ready fit for it, so it's not surprising lots of fans didn't see him as a bluesman, but guys like Clapton and Beck would have known exactly where Hendrix was coming from. They realised Hendrix personified everything that every English blues musician aspired to. He was also their worst fear, because he wasn't 60 years old and from the plantation. He was the same age as them but what they'd learned second-hand, he had learned on the circuit, playing with the originals.
JIMI HENDRIX: Blues, man. Blues. For me that's the only music there is. *Hey Joe* is the blues version of a one-hundred-year-old cowboy song. Strictly speaking it isn't such a commercial song and I was amazed the number ended up so high in the charts.
MIKE VERNON (British blues record producer): At the time, I never really thought of him as being a blues guitarist. The blues hardly needed a reboot as it was already on its way with the help of Clapton, Peter Green etc. He was, undeniably, a refreshing change from all that had gone before him, although to some degree his antics were only extensions of early performers like Gatemouth Brown. But a blues guitarist? Mmm… well, he certainly could play and sing the blues when he chose to, but really, he was an innovator in what was to become the rock marketplace. To my way of thinking, more guitarists were influenced by Eric Clapton and Peter Green, and then Stevie Ray Vaughan, than Jimi Hendrix.
MARK KNOPFLER: The first time I heard *Hey Joe* on the radio, I completely freaked and immediately ran out and bought the record. I didn't even have a record player.

1966, DECEMBER 16
On the same day *Hey Joe* hits the shops, Hendrix plays at Chiselhurst Caves, London, where he first meets Roger Mayer, destined to play a major role in developing Jimi's array of guitar effects.
ROGER MAYER: I went there and brought some of my devices, such as the Octavia. I'd shown it to Jimmy Page, but he thought it was too far out. Jimi said, the moment we met, "Yeah, I'd like to try that stuff."

1966, DECEMBER 21
The Jimi Hendrix Experience play at Blaises Club, London, UK.
CHRIS WELCH (reviewer, *Melody Maker*): Jimi Hendrix, a fantastic American guitarist, blew the minds of the star packed crowd who… heard Jimi's trio blast through some beautiful sounds like *Rock Me Baby*, *Third Stone From The Sun*, *Hey Joe* and even an unusual version of The Troggs' *Wild Thing*. Jimi has great stage presence and an exceptional guitar technique which involved playing with his teeth on occasions and no hands at all on others! Jimi looks like becoming one of the big club names of '67.

1967, JANUARY 24
On their first appearance at The Marquee, London, The Jimi Hendrix Experience break the house record. Support band The Syn will later evolve into Yes.
PETER BANKS (guitarist, The Syn/Yes): It was a very peculiar gig. All The Beatles were there, and the Rolling Stones. Clapton and Beck and every other guitar player in town came along and we had to play to all these people. They were waiting for Jimi Hendrix but we had to play once, come off and then play another set. So people were going. "Well, thank God they've gone." Then we came back on again.
ERIC CLAPTON: He definitely pulled the rug out from under Cream. I told people like Pete Townshend about him and we'd go and see him.
PETE TOWNSHEND: The thing that really stunned Eric and me was the way he took what we did and made it better. And I really started to try to play. I thought I'd never, ever be as great as he is, but there's certainly no reason now why I shouldn't try. In fact, I remember saying to Eric, "I'm going to play him off the stage one day." But what Eric did was even more peculiar. He said, "Well, I'm going to pretend that I am Jimi Hendrix!"

1967, JANUARY 29
The Who headline a gig at The Saville Theatre, London, UK, supported by The

Led Zeppelin: fellow architects of the heavy blues sound.

Jimi Hendrix Experience, Koobas and Thoughts. In the audience are Eric Clapton and Jack Bruce of Cream, plus Brian May (later to play guitar for Queen).

BRIAN MAY (fan): I'd heard the solo on *Stone Free* and refused to believe that someone could actually play this. It had to be some kind of studio trickery, the way he talks to the guitar and the guitar talks back to him. I was already playing in a band called Smile and I thought I was a reasonably good guitarist, so I knew it wasn't possible. So I went to the Saville, determined to be a disbeliever, but I was swept off my feet. I thought, "This guy is the most astounding thing I've ever seen." And he did the *Stone Free* solo live, absolutely perfectly. It was back to the drawing board for me.

ERIC CLAPTON: I don't think Jack had really taken him in before… and when Jack did see it that night, after the gig he went home and came up with the riff [*Sunshine Of Your Love*]. It was strictly a dedication to Jimi. And then we wrote a song on top of it.

GETTY X3, REX

"Blues, man. Blues. For me, that's the only music there is. *Hey Joe* is the blues version of a 100-year-old song."

1967, FEBRUARY 3
At Olympic Studios, London, Hendrix completes the recording of *Purple Haze*, which includes the first use of Roger Mayer's Octavia pedal.

EDDIE KRAMER (engineer): At the end of the song, the high-speed guitar you hear was actually an Octavia guitar overdub we recorded first at a slower speed, then played back on a higher speed. The panning at the end was done to accentuate the effect.

ROGER MAYER: The basis was the blues, but the framework of the blues was too tight. We'd talk first about what he wanted the emotion of the song to be. What's the vision? He would talk in colours and my job was to give him the electronic palette which would engineer those colours so he could paint the canvas.

1967, MARCH 8
Hendrix plays at The Speakeasy, London.

JEFF BECK: For me, the first shockwave was Jimi Hendrix. That was the major thing that shook everybody up. Even though we'd all established ourselves as fairly safe in the guitar field, he came along and reset all of the rules in one evening. Next thing you know, Eric was moving ahead with Cream, and it was kicking off in big chunks.

Marshall Law

How Jimi Hendrix turned an amplifier into a definitive blues-rock icon.

THE BIRTH OF THE 100W STACK

It was The Who's Pete Townshend and John Entwistle who initiated the use of the 100-watt Marshall stack. Sick of failing to drown out their noisy mod audiences and be heard over the manic drumming of Keith Moon, they approached Jim Marshall, drum teacher and boss man at J&T Marshall Musical Instruments in Uxbridge Road, Hanwell, West London, and his engineers Ken Bran and Dudley Craven. At that point Marshall sold the JTM45, a 50-watt job based around the classic Fender Bassman.

By late '65, Townshend and Entwistle were using the first four pre-production Marshall JTM45 100 heads, the first draft of the now iconic model 1959 JTM100 Super Lead. Entwistle was the first to connect his new amp to a 4x12 cabinet but it was Townshend who first put one 4x12 on top of another to create a 'stack'. "I could never work out why most people played with them on the floor," he said. "I wanted them belting in my earhole."

Despite all their great work, The Who soon switched allegiance on to other amp brands like Vox, Sound City and Hi-watt. It was left to Jimi Hendrix to smash, beat and dry hump the 100-watt Marshall stack into rock iconography.

Jimi, bassist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell of The Experience first visited Marshall HQ on October 8, 1966. "I met Jimi through having taught Mitch Mitchell to play drums," remembered Jim Marshall, "and Mitch brought this guy along to the factory one day. This character said to me, 'I'm going to be the greatest,' and I thought, 'Oh no, not another American wanting something for nothing.' But his next words were, 'I don't want you to give them to me. I will pay the full price. I just want to know that wherever I am in the world, I won't be let down.' And Jimi, without doubt, became our greatest ambassador."

Hendrix now had the right backline to amplify his Fender Stratocasters and he soon set about establishing himself as the guitarist to fear and admire. "I can still remember him scaring the living daylights out of all the big English guitarists when he first came over here," said Marshall. "They'd never heard or seen anything like Jimi. No one had. His talent was extraordinary."

Thanks to British acts breaking ground in the US, Stateside guitarists began picking up the scent of Marshall. "Murray The K had a live show with Mitch Ryder, Otis Redding, Cream and The Who [1967, in Manhattan], and I was in The Vagrants, who also played on some of those shows," Mountain guitarist Leslie West tells *The Blues*. "I remember seeing The Who come out with these huge Marshall cabinets and make a fantastic noise. Those Marshalls had a lot to do with their sound. I knew right away I had to get some of them and eventually Manny's, a great music store in New York City, started bringing them in. I think I must have been the first guy in line to get them."

1967, MARCH 23
As *Purple Haze* enters the UK singles chart, Hendrix sells a Stratocaster at Selmer's Music Store in Central London, where Paul Kossoff, later to form Free, works as a sales assistant.
PAUL KOSSOFF: He had an odd look about him and smelled strange. He started playing some chord stuff like in *Little Wing*, and the salesman looked at him and couldn't believe it. Just seeing him really freaked me out. I just loved him to death. He was my hero.

1967, MAY 11
Eric Clapton buys his first wah wah pedal at Manny's guitar shop in New York City.
ERIC CLAPTON (guitarist, Cream): They said that Jimi had one and so that was enough for me. I had to have one too.

With the release of *Are You Experienced*, repeated plays made it possible for critics and fellow musicians to examine Hendrix's oeuvre in greater depth. Now, aspects of his playing which had first seemed totally revolutionary could clearly be seen to have roots not just in traditional blues, but in British blues.

1967, MAY 12
***Are You Experienced* is released in the UK. The album includes *Foxy Lady*, which includes a Jimmy Page riff lifted from the October 1966 single *Happenings Ten Years Time Ago* by The Yardbirds.**
STEPHEN DALE PETIT: *Love Or Confusion* takes a couple of British things, elements of The Beatles' *Tomorrow Never Knows* and The Yardbirds' *Shapes Of Things*, both of which use a home key, go down a step and then return to the home key.

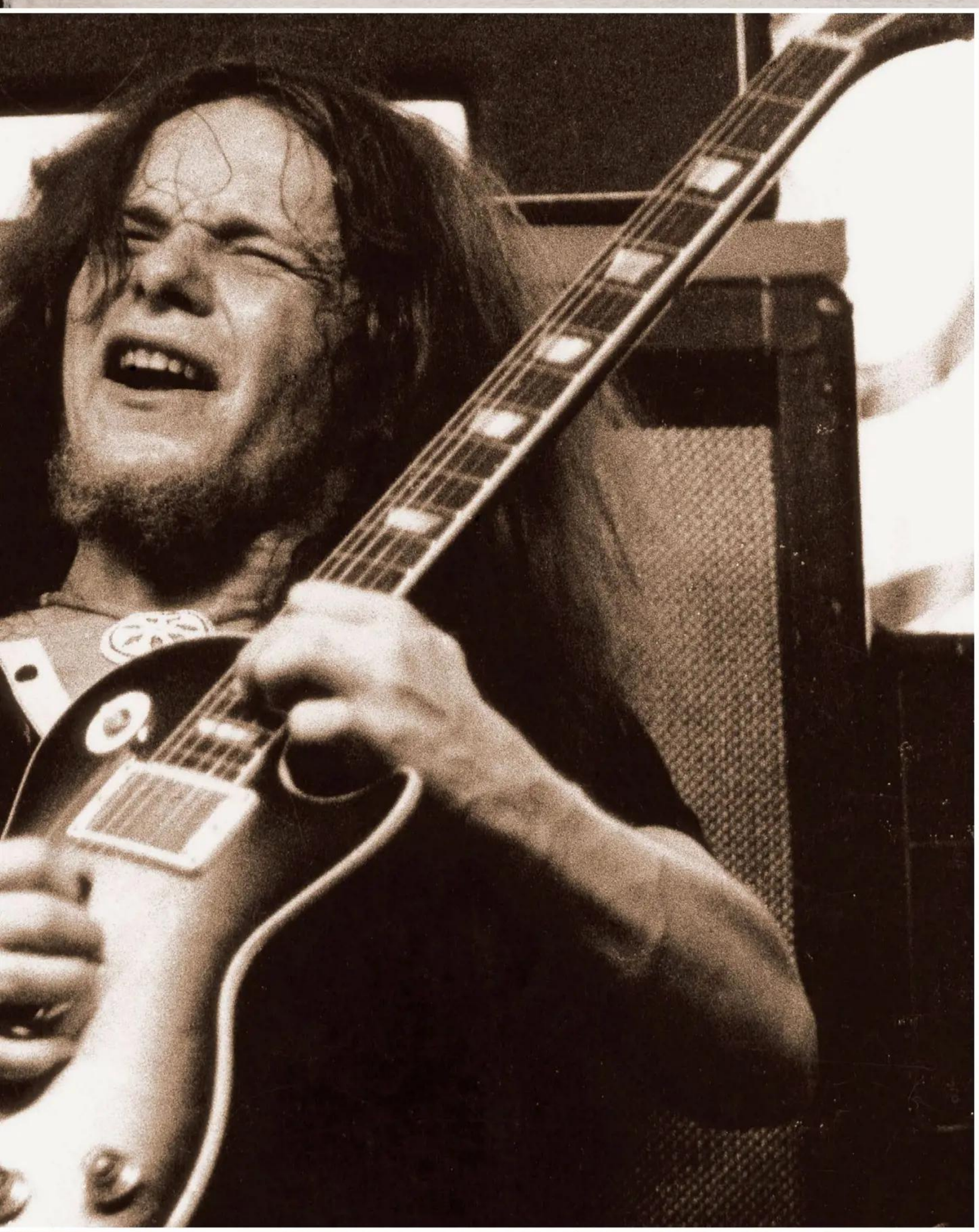
Using Marshall amplification, sonically and texturally Hendrix could sound very different than his influences and heroes, but the last three licks of the solo in *Hey Joe* clearly display the feel and the phrasing of Albert King. *Stone Free* exhibits the approach, attitude and composition – including melodic content and vibrato – of Hubert Sumlin

Generally I hear Hubert Sumlin and Willie Johnson all through Hendrix's playing – a clear line can be drawn from Willie Johnson through Hendrix to white blues-based hard rock and heavy metal.
JOE SATRIANI: *Red House* was a nod to his blues roots. I think the most underrated part of his playing is his sense of melody in everything he played, his way-in-the-pocket rhythm playing, and his combining of both into memorable parts that defined each song as a unique piece of music.
JOHN LEE HOOKER: I've always loved that song [*Red House*]. I loved the way Jimi did it. I never did see him play. I know he was seen as somebody in the rock side of things, but underneath he was a blues man. He played a mean blues guitar.
LESLIE WEST (guitarist, Mountain): I heard Hendrix playing *Are You Experienced* and I said, "What the fuck is this?" It blew my mind! The way he used that whammy bar? Forget about it. He'd knock those strings out of tune and then he'd stretch them right back into tune. The guy was unreal.

Free agent: Paul Kossoff helped write the book on heavy blues guitar...

When Hendrix returned to America, on June 18, 1967, to play at Monterey Pop Festival, a whole new transatlantic crop of guitarists was exposed to the phenomenon for the first time. Mike Bloomfield, Johnny Winter, Stephen Stills and Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top are only a handful of those who subsequently acknowledged Hendrix's powerful impact on them. Having achieved massive success at Monterey, Hendrix next began touring America.

1967, JUNE 18
The Jimi Hendrix Experience play at Monterey Pop Festival, Monterey, California.
STEVE MILLER: I was immediately amazed when he opened with *Killing Floor*. I had heard Wolf and Hubert play it so many times in Chicago, and when I saw what Jimi did to it, it was as if what I had been trying to do for years suddenly became perfectly clear. I immediately understood what I had been longing and searching for.



> **“Hendrix was seen as someone on the rock side of things, but underneath he was a blues man.”**

1967, AUGUST 9
The Jimi Hendrix Experience play at The Ambassador Theatre, Washington DC. In the audience is Nils Lofgren.
NILS LOFGREN: When I saw Jimi Hendrix, I just was possessed. I realised, “Oh my God, this is what I want to do. It’s going to be my career.” And there was no turning back.

1967, OCTOBER 17
Jimi Hendrix jams with John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers, standing in briefly for Mick Taylor, at Klooks Kleek, London.
JOHN MAYALL: When he sat in with you, he would just fall right into whatever you were doing. He was just a natural musician and I don’t think upstaging was any part of his persona. He loved to play, he dug music and he loved the attention he was getting.
MICK TAYLOR: I just thought he was amazing. For a guitarist to have that energy in his playing, and also the control and the rhythm. You know, for most guitarists it’s incredibly difficult to play like that, or to even play anywhere near that standard in a three-piece group. I mean, Eric Clapton did it with Cream. And Hendrix was great, the way he switched from rhythm to leads. His guitar and his voice were almost like the same thing.

GETTY

The essentials

Our pick of the 20 heavy blues albums you need to own.

THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE Are You Experienced (1967)
Jimi’s debut screamed his appreciation of the blues heavyweights, while announcing that he wasn’t afraid to torch their set texts. Thrilling if you were a listener. Terrifying if you were a guitarist.

THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE Axis: Bold As Love (1967)
The gonzoid intergalactic revue sketches might be your abiding memory of *Axis*, but Jimi’s rush-recorded second album was home to some stingers. “There’s such a fierceness to his playing,” says Philip Sayce. “But he was completely connected to the source.”

THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE Electric Ladyland (1968)
It had more colours than a detonated Dulux factory, but Jimi’s third album still referenced his chitlin’ circuit roots, from the kazoo-powered R&B bounce of *Crosstown Traffic* to the power-blues jam *Voodoo Chile*. *Ladyland* remains his sky-kissing peak.

CREAM Fresh Cream (1966)
If Eric Clapton’s move to quit the Bluesbreakers smacked of callow career suicide, it was vindicated by his power-trio’s 1966 debut. EC’s solos ensured that *Fresh Cream* kept one foot in the blues.

FREE Tons Of Sobs (1968)
Four oiks with an £800 recording budget didn’t seem much to conjure with, but Free’s debut was an absolute belter. It might not have charted, but the cultural ripples were undeniable.

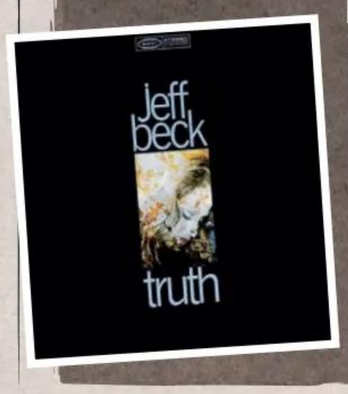
LED ZEPPELIN Led Zeppelin (1969)
Granted, Zeppelin were light-fingered operators on their debut, plundering the back pages of Willie Dixon, J.B. Lenoir et al, but their stone-cold genius lay in hitting the throttle and minting that sound.

LED ZEPPELIN Led Zeppelin II (1969)
The official line is that this album marks the gearshift from blues to rock, but Jimmy Page’s first love is undeniably still present in the scuttling mania of *The Lemon Song* and the route-one *Heartbreaker*.

TEN YEARS AFTER Ten Years After (1967)
While Alvin Lee had yet to find his voice as a songwriter, the band’s white-knuckle way with a cover saw them prise apart the fingers of Willie Dixon et al to claim standards like *Spoonful* as their own.

FLEETWOOD MAC Then Play On (1969)
The Mac were shortly to morph beyond recognition, but Peter Green’s final album at the helm was a blues treasure trove, taking in *Rattlesnake Shake*’s slithering funk, the out-there improv of *Searching For Madge* and – for US punters – the deathless clatter of *Oh Well*.

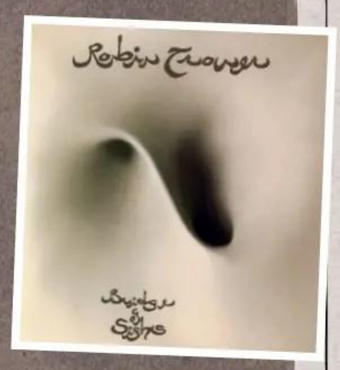
JEFF BECK GROUP Truth (1968)



Beck’s high-water mark was so ferocious that it often nudged beyond heavy blues into proto-metal. The tough covers of *You Shook Me* and *I Ain’t Superstitious* took *Truth* to No.15 in the US. “We didn’t know at the time,” noted Rod Stewart, “how important this album would become.”

The essentials

The top 20 heavy blues albums you need to own (continued).



ROBIN TROWER
Bridge Of Sighs (1974)
Trower had always favoured the US originators over the British boomers, but he walked the tightrope on this career peak. "It's a very powerful piece of work," he said.

JEFF BECK GROUP
Beck-Ola (1969)
Beck-Ola arrived with a sleeve disclaimer, admitting that as it was "almost impossible" to write new songs, the band had focused instead on "heavy music". Maybe so, but when Beck and Stewart butted heads on highlights like *All Shook Up*, the derivative sounded just dandy.

TASTE Taste (1969)
The debut album by a 20-year-old Rory Gallagher and his Cork power-trio can still scorch your eyebrows. *Blister On The Moon* sets a roaring pace that's somehow maintained throughout.

LESLIE WEST Mountain (1969)
The New Yorker cited Cream as his starting pistol. "The British imitated our black blues players," West told *The Blues*. "We imitated the British imitating black guys. The more things change, the more they stay the same."

BLUE CHEER Vincebus Eruptum (1968)
The West Coast trio's debut piled everything in, turned it up, and oiled the wheels with lashings of LSD. Not even The Who could match their *Summertime Blues*. It's one part music, two parts assault and battery.

RORY GALLAGHER Deuce (1971)
Gallagher's second album was bent on capturing the crush of the front row. Often tracking immediately after gigs to hold the momentum, *Deuce* exploded out of the speakers and rarely let go of your lapels.

AC/DC T.N.T. (1975)
This second Oz-only album marked the moment when AC/DC became the fist-tight, crunch-blues miscreants of legend. Tracks like *The Jack* and *High Voltage* were smash-and-grab belters.

WHITESNAKE Ready An' Willing (1980)
A solid-gold line-up – Micky Moody, Bernie Marsden, Jon Lord, Ian Paice – ensured that even the filler here was thumping, while hooky standouts like *Fool For Your Loving* helped the album slither to No.6 in the UK.

GARY MOORE Still Got The Blues (1990)
The success of Moore's stopgap blues project was the happiest of accidents. "That whole album was killer," noted Danny Bryant. "He was a rock artist, he'd been in Thin Lizzy, and had solo hits, and he just did a blues album in three weeks. He was worried the fans wouldn't accept it, but it became his biggest seller."

RIVAL SONS
Head Down (2012)
"The next album," threatened Jay Buchanan back in 2011, "is gonna sound like a hammer and a buzzsaw getting in a fight." True enough, the LA band's breakthrough third entered the ring with the pugnacious *Keep On Swinging*, and rained endless blues-rock anvils. Finally, after a good pummelling, they kissed it better with the gorgeous Zep-folk of *True*.

Smokin' hot: Jimi Hendrix with Eric Clapton in 1967.

If Hendrix was the trigger, the first heavy blues bullet out of the gun was Cream's second album, *Disraeli Gears*. A psychedelic quantum leap ahead of their debut, sonically much heavier but still dominated by Clapton's blues guitar solos, it delivered their American breakthrough, reaching No.4 on the Billboard chart.

1967, NOVEMBER 3
Cream release *Disraeli Gears*.
ERIC CLAPTON: We went off to America to record *Disraeli Gears*, which I thought was an incredibly good album. And when we got back, no one was interested because *Are You Experienced* had come out and wiped everybody else out, including us. Jimi had it sewn up. He'd taken the blues and made it incredibly cutting-edge. I was in awe of him.

1967, DECEMBER 15
The Who release *The Who Sell Out*.
STEPHEN DALE PETIT: I think it was Jimi's arrival that made a lead guitar player out of Pete Townshend, because when he got into his boiler-suit era he was suddenly soloing, really flying, playing some amazing shit as a soloist, which he never did before.

1968, FEBRUARY 10
The Jimi Hendrix Experience headline at The Shrine Auditorium, Los Angeles. Support band The Electric Flag feature guitarist Mike Bloomfield.
MIKE BLOOMFIELD: For years, all the Negroes who'd make it into the white market made it through servility, like Fats Domino – a lovable, jolly, fat image – or they had been spades who had been picked up by the white market. Now here's this cat, you know: "I am a super spade, man. I am, like, black and tough."

1968, MAY 10
The Fillmore East, New York City, USA.
PAUL STANLEY (guitarist, Kiss): I grew up going to Fillmore East, seeing Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Humble Pie. Hendrix was like somebody from another planet. God bless Stevie Ray Vaughan, but there wouldn't be an SRV without a Hendrix.

1968, JULY
Deep Purple release their debut album, *Shades Of Deep Purple*, which includes a cover of *Hey Joe* in the Hendrix style.
RITCHIE BLACKMORE (guitarist, Deep Purple): I was impressed by Hendrix. Not

REX x2

Clapton in ‘67: wearing his Jimi influence on his sleeve... and head.

The Real Me

Jimi Hendrix by those who knew him best... *AS TOLD TO DAVID SINCLAIR*

"Hendrix has since been made into something he never thought he would be, I'm sure of that. I got a letter inviting me to go to a ceremony in LA where they put a star for him in Hollywood Boulevard. That would have been about the biggest insult imaginable in the '60s, to suggest to him that one day 'Jimi you will be such a part of the establishment, they will put a star for you on Hollywood Boulevard'. It was as if everything he had stood against and played against was being forced upon him after he'd died. He might have seen the funny side of it, but I certainly didn't go to the ceremony."

Gerry Stickells (Roadie/Road Manager)

"After he died, it seemed as if everyone knew Hendrix, but he didn't make friends easily, certainly not in public because he was basically very shy. When I first met him, he was very quiet and polite. It was only when we were working that he used to do the wild man bit. He was quite disorganised. He would lose things and he used to have an untidy room. He wouldn't know how to check in at an airport. I had to check in for the group."

Noel Redding (bassist, The Experience)

"He wasn't an extrovert at all. He was a very reserved but happy character. I shared two flats with him and he was a perfectly straight dude. He'd do much the same as anyone else, except he'd have a guitar on when he was doing it. He'd fry his breakfast in the morning with a guitar round his neck. We played board games, like Risk, a lot. "He was very easy to work with in the studio; we only ever had one ruck, the first time we went in to record. We got into quite a heated row over the sheer volume of the guitar. At one point he said, 'This is useless I'll never be able to make a record here'. As it happened I'd just come from the visa office and I had his passport and a return ticket to America in my pocket. So I handed them to him and I said, 'Go on then. Fuck off back to America'. And he just burst out laughing. That was the end of that and we never argued again."

Chas Chandler (first manager and producer)

"Jimi was too easy to get along with. He just had a real gentleness and a kindness about him and in my opinion it got him in a lot of trouble. Not everyone took advantage of him, but then again I saw a lot of people who did.

Buddy Miles (drummer, Band Of Gypsys)

"Jimi could be as moody as hell, but I always found him funny. The band never split up for me. Jimi and I always played together, and it was fun. Even while the Band Of Gypsys was going on, we carried on working in the studio together. He put up with a lot of bullshit, but the music was the most important thing. And if that ain't right, forget it."

Mitch Mitchell (drummer, The Experience)

so much by his playing, as his attitude. He wasn't a great player, but everything else about him was brilliant. Even the way he walked was amazing.

1968, AUGUST

The Jeff Beck Group release their debut LP, *Truth*. Along with Cream and Led Zeppelin, they would prove pivotal in taking rock into heavier territory and paving the way for heavy metal.

AL KOOPER: *Rock My Plimsoul* uses a quarter-note triplet turnaround which is very effective and the track bounces around like a pinball machine. Beck sounds a lot like Hendrix on this.

As the decade entered its final year, Hendrix was losing focus, but stunning debut LPs by Led Zeppelin, Free, Taste and others confirmed that heavy blues was fast becoming the name of the game. This innovative form of blues eschewed authenticity, did not try to remain true to Mississippi or Chicago, and was more excited by the possibilities of creating a contemporary music that reflected the passions and interests of the rising generation.

1969, JANUARY 12

Led Zeppelin release their eponymous debut LP, which scores 73 weeks on the Billboard chart and 79 in the UK. Its most obviously blues-oriented cuts are *You Shook Me*, *I Can't Quit You Baby* and *How Many More Times*, but these were interwoven with intimations of what would become heavy metal and shades of art rock, dragging the blues superstructure into pastures new. All of this was rendered aurally fresh by Page's innovation of placing an extra microphone 20 feet away from the band to gather their ambient sound. Contemporary critics hated it, but time has proven this to have been a groundbreaking leap forward.

JIMMY PAGE: There were a lot of improvisations on the first album, but generally we were keeping everything cut and dried. Consequently, by the time we'd finished the first tour, the riffs which were coming out of these spaces, we were able to use for the immediate recording of the second album.

JOHN MAYALL: People like Jimmy Page, Gary Moore, Jeff Beck and several others, you could tell they were incorporating things that Jimi was doing into their music. His influence was very strong in that heavy blues direction.

1969, MARCH 14

Free release their debut LP, *Tons Of Sobs*. More minimal and less eclectic than Zeppelin's debut, it was nevertheless another radical fusion of blues structures with hard rock attitudes, delivering a vibrant attack to the band's distinctively melodic songs.

PAUL RODGERS (vocalist, Free): The songs I had written up to that point were blues songs. I looked around and I saw everybody – the bands that had real credibility and meaning, somebody like Jimi Hendrix and Cream – what they were doing was taking the blues to a different place. They were making it their own. I suppose Hendrix was almost like a psychedelic blues and Cream. Well, that's what it was in a way – psychedelic blues. And I said to Paul [Kossoff, Free guitarist]: "That's what we have to do – take what we have now and write our own songs and find our own identity, basically." So it grew right out of the blues.

1969, APRIL 1

Taste, led by guitarist Rory Gallagher, release their eponymous debut LP. Arguably the most traditionally blues-oriented album of this burgeoning new generation, *Taste* was nevertheless infused with the restless energy that was supercharging blues as the decade closed. Hendrix himself was evidently impressed because, when asked how it felt to be the greatest guitarist in the world, he's said to have replied, "I don't know, go ask Rory Gallagher."

RORY GALLAGHER : Before Hendrix, Jeff Beck had distorted his guitar and so had Keith Richards, and there was distortion on the early 50s blues records. They didn't use it as a technique but they had small amplifiers that were turned up very loud and it became part and parcel of the Chicago blues sound. Hendrix trimmed it and made it into an art form.

1969, JULY

Leslie West releases his debut LP, *Mountain*, a decidedly heavy blues offering, clearly inspired by the Cream/Hendrix power trio format, and produced by Cream collaborator Felix Pappalardi, who also played bass.

LESLIE WEST: Led Zeppelin, Cream and Hendrix were huge at that time. Being from New York, I was never into the San Francisco sound – the Dead, the Airplane and all that. But when these guys started coming over from England, a different world opened up. I mean, the Stones had great blues riffs in the mid-60s, like *Satisfaction*, *The Last Time*. But when Cream and Hendrix came along, I knew it was time for me to start practising. Cream was probably the most influential on me. It was weird because the British guys were imitating Black American blues guys, and then we were imitating the British guys.

1969, AUGUST

Humble Pie release their debut LP, *As Safe As Yesterday Is*, on Immediate Records in the UK.

PETER FRAMPTON (guitarist, Humble Pie): Clapton's blues style was very sophisticated and charming. Very 'on the money'. Hendrix comes over. [His playing] wasn't ugly, but it was more ballsy. A little out of tune, but it was full of passion. I think it's his passion that I love most of all.

1969, NOVEMBER 7

Hendrix is at the Record Plant, New York City, USA, working on *Izabella* and *Room Full Of Mirrors*.

LESLIE WEST (guitarist, Mountain): When we were recording *Mountain Climbing* in the Record Plant, Jimi was recording *Band Of Gypsys* in the next door studio. So he came in and listened

GETTY, PHOTOSHOT X2

Slash: heavy blues fan and Hendrix disciple...

to *Never In My Life* and he looked at me and said, "Nice riff, man." He gave me a compliment. That was all I needed to hear.

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN: By the end of the 1960s, Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton had turned the rock'n'roll generation on its collective head. Of course, that would not have been possible without the music created by the great black blues players such as Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Fred McDowell, Buddy Guy and the great B.B. King.

Jimi Hendrix died just months later, on September 18, 1970, but the heavy blues boom he initiated lived on and thrived. ZZ Top would release their first album in January 1971, the same year in which the Stones got noticeably heavier with *Sticky Fingers*. Kiss would unleash their debut in February 1974, and proof of the lasting appeal of heavy blues music came with the emergence of Stevie Ray Vaughan in 1983 and Joe Bonamassa at the start of the new millennium.

"The attraction with Jimi was just that he had this uninhibited, fluid style that basically screamed."

JOE BONAMASSA: I don't think there's any music that you hear on the radio today that would be possible without Jimi Hendrix.

JOE SATRIANI: He was the deepest blues player. He played the saddest stuff and he played the funniest. He played the most outside stuff, but it was really from the gut. He strayed from the traditional blues playing, yet he always seemed to incorporate the moans and the cries into a phrasing that was completely blues.

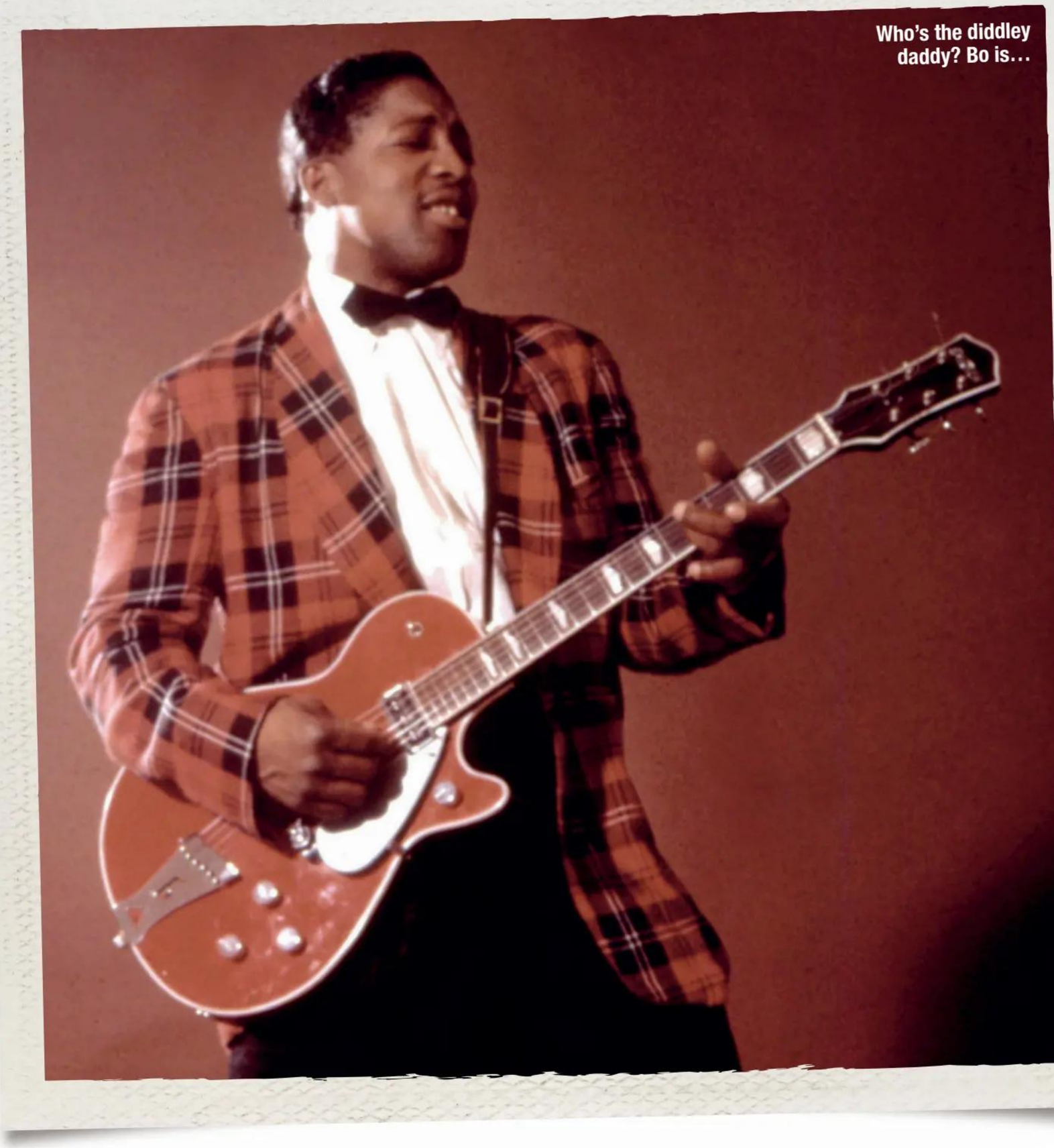
SLASH: I think the attraction with Jimi was just that he had this uninhibited, fluid guitar style that basically screamed. It had this over-the-top sound to it that just kind of drew me in.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN: I loved Jimi a lot. He was so much more than just a blues guitarist. He could do anything.

JIMI HENDRIX: I've been imitated so well I've heard people copy my mistakes.

Sources : the interviews with John Mayall, Leslie West, Dave Gregory and Stephen Dale Petit in this feature are all by Johnny Black. All other quotes come from archive interviews in Guitar Player, Guitar World, Rock And Folk, Rolling Stone, Uncut and The Quietus.

For more information on Jimi Hendrix, see the official website at www.jimihendrix.com.



Who's the diddley daddy? Bo is…

Bo Diddley

Gunslingin', cigar-box guitar-totin' cool cat who wrote the book of rocking R&B, covered by them all. Now hear the judge…

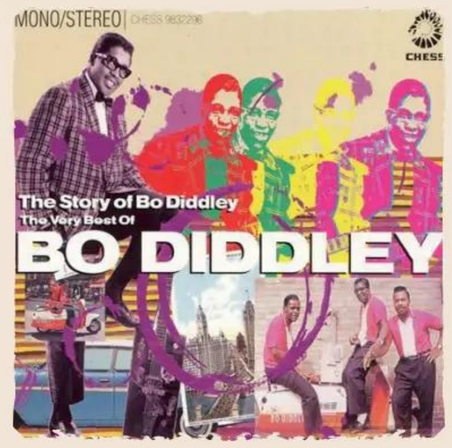
WITH HIS THICK, black-rimmed glasses, vibrant red and black plaid jacket and custom made Gretsch guitar with its rectangle shape, Bo Diddley cut a striking presence, as did what he called his "freight train sound", a combination of distorted, frenetic rhythm guitar playing and ferocious maraca shaking, the latter thanks to his musical partner, Jerome Green.

Not the most prolific artist, preferring to concentrate on live performance he, nevertheless, released 24 studio albums, six live albums and 37 singles in his lifetime, most of which were recorded for the Chess label with whom he found success from the off with his 1955 debut single, the self mythologising *Bo Diddley* backed with *I'm A Man*. It landed him a US R&B number 2 hit and its influence is incommensurable. Along with a string of future classics including *Diddley Daddy*, *Who Do You Love?*, *Roadrunner* and *Say Man*, it not only aided the smooth passage of blues and R&B to rock'n'roll, but also gave rise to the 60s British beat boom. The Pretty Things named themselves after Bo's song of a similar name; the Rolling Stones, Manfred Mann, The Kinks, The Animals and The Yardbirds all covered his material. More recently The Strypes have also paid tribute.

Born Otha Ellas Bates in McComb, Mississippi in 1928, Bo Diddley moved to Chicago, started playing violin as a boy in the Baptist church, then took up the guitar and plied his trade in The Hipsters and the Langley Avenue Jive Cats on the city's street corners. As a soloist, he graduated from blues clubs to New York's Carnegie Hall, playing there in 1955. In 1957 he wrote *Love Is Strange*, a US hit for Mickey & Sylvia; in 1967 and '68 with Muddy Waters, he recorded *Super Blues* and *The Super Super Blues Band*. 1966's *Ooh Baby* provided his last hit single. His final album, 1996's *A Man Amongst Men*, featuring Ron Wood and Keith Richards, made the US Top 10 Blues Chart.

ALICE CLARK

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction



THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY: THE VERY BEST OF
Chess

Where it all began plus a bucketload more.

A 'best of' is often seen as a cop out, but this 54-track double CD really is essential for both the Bo neophyte and the connoisseur.

For a start, it contains the entirety of *Bo Diddley*, his 1958 first album for the Chess label. A 12-track compilation of his early singles, it's where it all began, not just for Bo, but for rock'n'roll and R&B. Spanning his inaugural self-titled single to his ninth 45, the thrilling *Hush Your Mouth*, taking in *Pretty Thing*, *Diddy Wah Diddy*, *Who Do You Love?* et al, it's the perfect encapsulation of what made him so great. There's distorted guitar squalls, Jerome Green's brazen maraca shaking and the Bo Diddley beat, alternatively known as the shave and a haircut two bits, and more commonly, in musical terms, the clave rhythm – it goes bomp, ba-bomp-bomp, bomp-bomp – providing the backbone throughout.

The rest of *The Story Of Bo Diddley* traces his development as he hits his creative stride, first with Peggy Jones and then with the Duchess, through successful experiments in doo wop, country, funk and rap – *Say Man*, his sole US pop Top 20 hit, can be seen as a blueprint for the latter with its quick-witted vocal sparring.

The compilation also emphasises his hugely important role, not just in the evolution of black music, but in white rock too – as British blues catalyst inspiring a generation including Eric Clapton and the Stones with songs like *You Can't Judge A Book By The Cover* and celebrated B-side *(I Need You Baby) Mona* and as a punk and grunge incubator. The New York Dolls covered the saucy *Pills*; Dr Feelgood the jerky *I Can Tell*; The Clash took Bo out on the road on their 1979 US tour.

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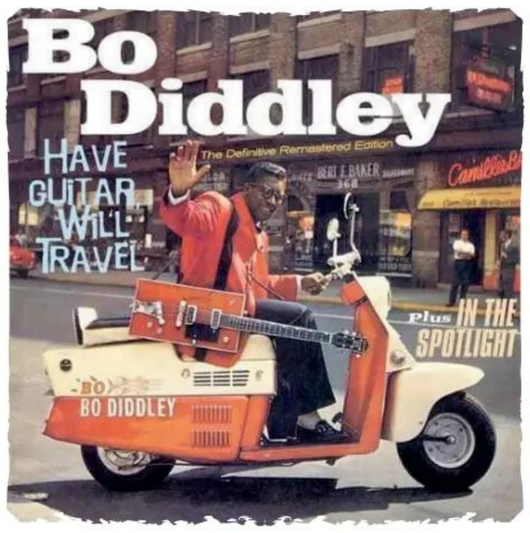
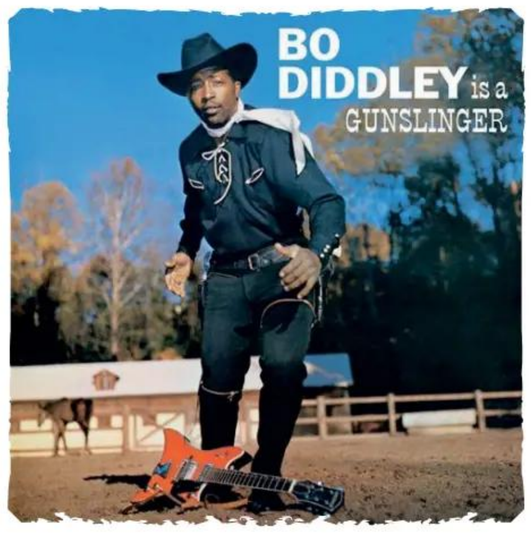
SUPERIOR
The releases that built his reputation



HAVE GUITAR WILL TRAVEL
Checker

Making history with guitarist Peggy Jones.

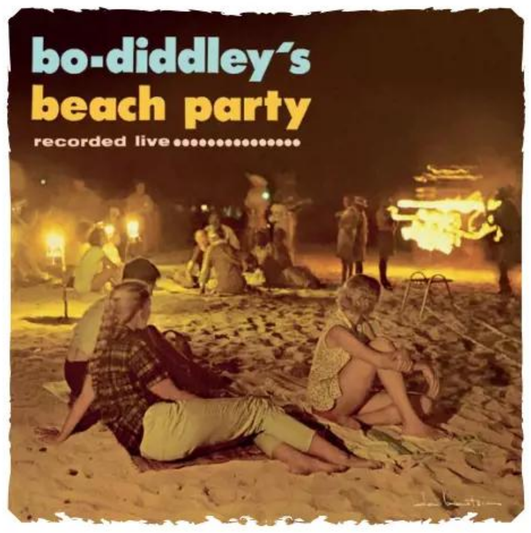
Peggy Jones had joined Bo on guitar on 1959's *Go Bo Diddley* but on its 1960 follow-up they scaled new creative heights. Providing a platform for his conversational storytelling skill and gnarly guitar style, it features the singles *Cops & Robbers*, a comical tale of a liquor store robbery and *Say Man, Back Again*, the hip speak follow up to *Say Man. Mumblin' Guitar*, a grumbling instrumental, predating grunge by three decades. Available on a CD twofer with *In The Spotlight*, his fourth album, also from 1960 and another winner.



BO DIDDLEY IS A GUNSLINGER
Chess

His first UK Top 20 hit album.

His first album to be recorded in his home studio in Washington DC and his first without any input from Chess owners Leonard and Phil Chess, 1960's fifth album cast Bo as a country-based singer on nine originals and a cover of Ernie Ford's *Sixteen Tons*, a song Bo was due to perform live on Ed Sullivan's *Toast Of The Town* TV show in 1955. He played his then current single *Bo Diddley* instead and the unimpressed host refused to have him on the show again. It's ace from beginning to end, the sleeve artwork too, with Bo's cowboy look inspired by *The Magnificent Seven*.



BO DIDDLEY'S BEACH PARTY
Checker

Bo causes a stir in the segregated South.

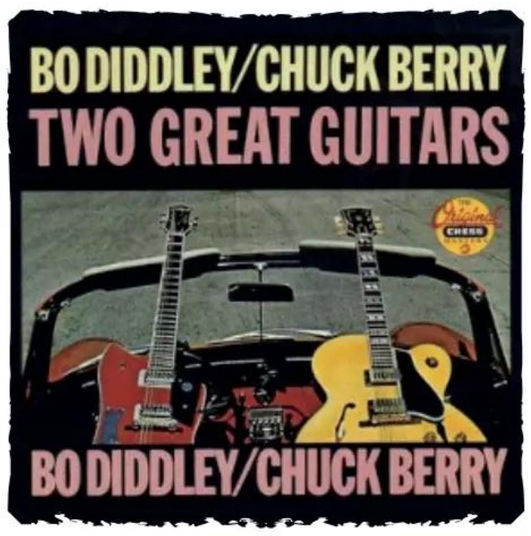
Chess got the tapes rolling at the Beach Club in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina on July 5 and 6, 1963 to capture Bo's stage show. One of the nights came to an abrupt halt after the police were called when Jerome Green jumped into the crowd and danced with white female audience members – it was a segregated venue – but there was still plenty of material to choose from, including the rollicking *I'm All Right* later covered by the Stones, plus a rowdy rendition of Chuck Berry's *Memphis*.

GOOD
Worth a butcher's

THE BLACK GLADIATOR
Checker

Bo gets the funk.

Muddy Waters made *Electric Mud*, Howlin' Wolf *The Howlin' Wolf Album*, and so The Originator moved with the times, looking to Sly And The Family Stone and Parliament-Funkadelic on this 1970 album of hard funk grooves. Still unmistakably Bo, with its bashed out beat and audacious jive talkin', but it's pinned to a canvas of propulsive Hammond, deliquescent bass, fluid drums and call and response gospel background vocals. Stand out tracks: the frenzied *Elephant Man*; the rockin' *Bo Diddley* update, *You, Bo Diddley*.

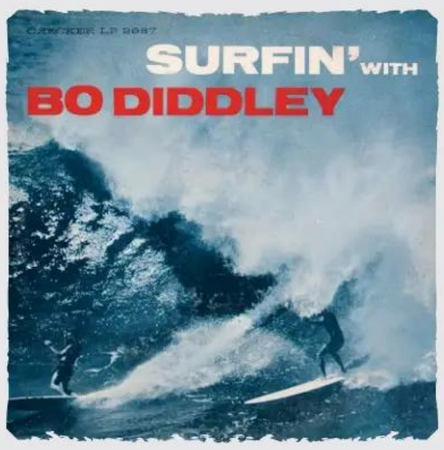


TWO GREAT GUITARS
Checker

Bo and Chuck's only joint recording session.

Recorded at Ter Mar Recording Studio in Chicago in 1964, this guitar duel between Bo and his pal and Chess label mate Chuck Berry captures the guitarist at his most loose and carefree on three of the album's four tracks. Two, *Chuck's Beat* and *Bo's Beat* are spectacular off-the-cuff jams clocking in at just over 10 and 14 minutes respectively. Also included is Bo's rousing take on *When The Saints Go Marching In*, plus the Chuck Berry instrumental original *Liverpool Drive*.

AVOID
Like the plague



SURFIN' WITH BO DIDDLEY
Checker

Trading under false pretences.

Diddley wasn't a surfer, he also appeared on just four of the 12 tracks on this 1963 album. The rest feature Sun rockabilly Billy Lee Riley and the Megatons, which means the playing is by no means bad, it just isn't Bo. Sadly the material is simple surf craze cash-ins with silly titles (*Piggy Back Surfers*, *Surfboard Cha Cha* and *Twisting Waves)*. There's also a misguided attempt to turn *Ol' Man River* into a twanging instrumental.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

BO DIDDLEY
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

I'M A MAN
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

YOU DON'T LOVE ME (YOU DON'T CARE)
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

BRING IT TO JEROME
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

WHO DO YOU LOVE?
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

COPS AND ROBBERS
HAVE GUITAR WILL TRAVEL

MONA (I NEED YOU BABY)
HAVE GUITAR WILL TRAVEL

BEFORE YOU ACCUSE ME
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

SAY MAN
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

MUMBLIN' GUITAR
HAVE GUITAR WILL TRAVEL

ROAD RUNNER
IN THE SPOTLIGHT

RIDE ON JOSEPHINE
BO DIDDLEY IS A GUNSLINGER

GUNSLINGER
BO DIDDLEY IS A GUNSLINGER

PILLS
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK BY THE COVER
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

I CAN TELL
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

MEMPHIS (LIVE)
BO DIDDLEY'S BEACH PARTY

ELEPHANT MAN
THE BLACK GLADIATOR

PRETTY THING
THE STORY OF BO DIDDLEY

The Wolf gets to work in London.

GETTY

THE KILLING FLOOR

Now revered as a linchpin moment in the history of the blues, Howlin' Wolf's 1970 *London Sessions* with a superstar assemblage of England's rock royalty, started with a chance encounter several months earlier at a gig in San Francisco.

Words: **Johnny Black**

Backstage at the gig, blues guitarist Mike Bloomfield of the Electric Flag introduced Eric Clapton to Chess Records producer Norman Dayron and, in the course of a rambling conversation about their blues heroes, Dayron floated the idea that he might be able to put together an album on which Clapton would play with the legendary Howlin' Wolf.

Clapton's eyes lit up but there was one catch. Nobody had yet suggested the idea to Howlin' Wolf...

May 1, 1970 : Howlin' Wolf, Hubert Sumlin, Jeff Carp, Norman Dayron and others fly to London.

Norman Dayron: When I had first told Wolf what I was thinking of, he thought it was a horrible idea. He didn't know who these guys were, but we'd worked together, and he trusted me, so he came round to it.

In all there were about 10 people in our party, professional bluesmen from Chicago, in case any of the English guys Clapton had organised didn't show up. As it turned out, I only needed to use Hubert and our 18-year-old harmonica wizard Jeff Carp.

Myself and all of my musicians stayed at The Cumberland Hotel, and we had a small fleet of taxis organised to drive them down to Olympic Studios every day.

Hubert Sumlin: The company [Chess Records] in the States just wanted Wolf with Eric Clapton and the rest of the guys. They was going to leave me back. Eric made a statement, telegraphed these people. If I wasn't going to be on there, he wasn't going to be on there. So they said to me, "Hey man, pack your bags – you got to go!"

Norman Dayron: It was always my intention that Hubert would come with us. I was, by this time, an independent producer, so I controlled the budget, I booked the tickets. It's conceivable that Leonard Chess may have had a private conversation with Hubert and may have said something like that to him, but I wanted him there. Hubert had been concerned about what his role was going to be. I explained, before we left Chicago, that I wanted him to play rhythm guitar, and he was perfectly happy about that.

Eric Clapton: The guy that organised the session wanted me to play lead instead of Hubert Sumlin. Hubert ended up supplementing, playing rhythm, which I thought was all wrong, because he knew all the parts that were necessary and I didn't.

Howlin' Wolf had this guitarist who was just so fuckin' incredible... Eric just let the guy take it.

RINGO STARR

Ringo Starr: Two memories are that Howlin' Wolf was incredible! And his guitarist – he had this guitarist with him who was just so fuckin' incredible. Eric was on the sessions and he just let the guy take it, y'know. It was really a moment to see, Mr Guitar himself bowing to this guy who really played the way [Eric] played.

May 2, 1970 : Olympic Studios, London, recording *I Ain't Superstitious*, *Goin' Down Slow* and *I Want To Have A Word With You*.

Glyn Johns (engineer): I had received a call from the fellow who, so-called, produced it. He was an American. His name was Norman Dayron and he proved to be a complete inadequate. He said that he wanted to re-record Howlin' Wolf, using a bunch of English rock'n'roll musicians. He'd booked Olympic Studios and asked if I'd engineer it, and I said I would.

Norman Dayron: When I got to Olympic, one of the first things I realised was that their recording techniques were more designed for classical music than blues. They used lots of condenser microphones which did not give the kind of focused, sharp sound that we were getting at Chess. Regrettably, I was not subtle in making suggestions about how to change the sound.

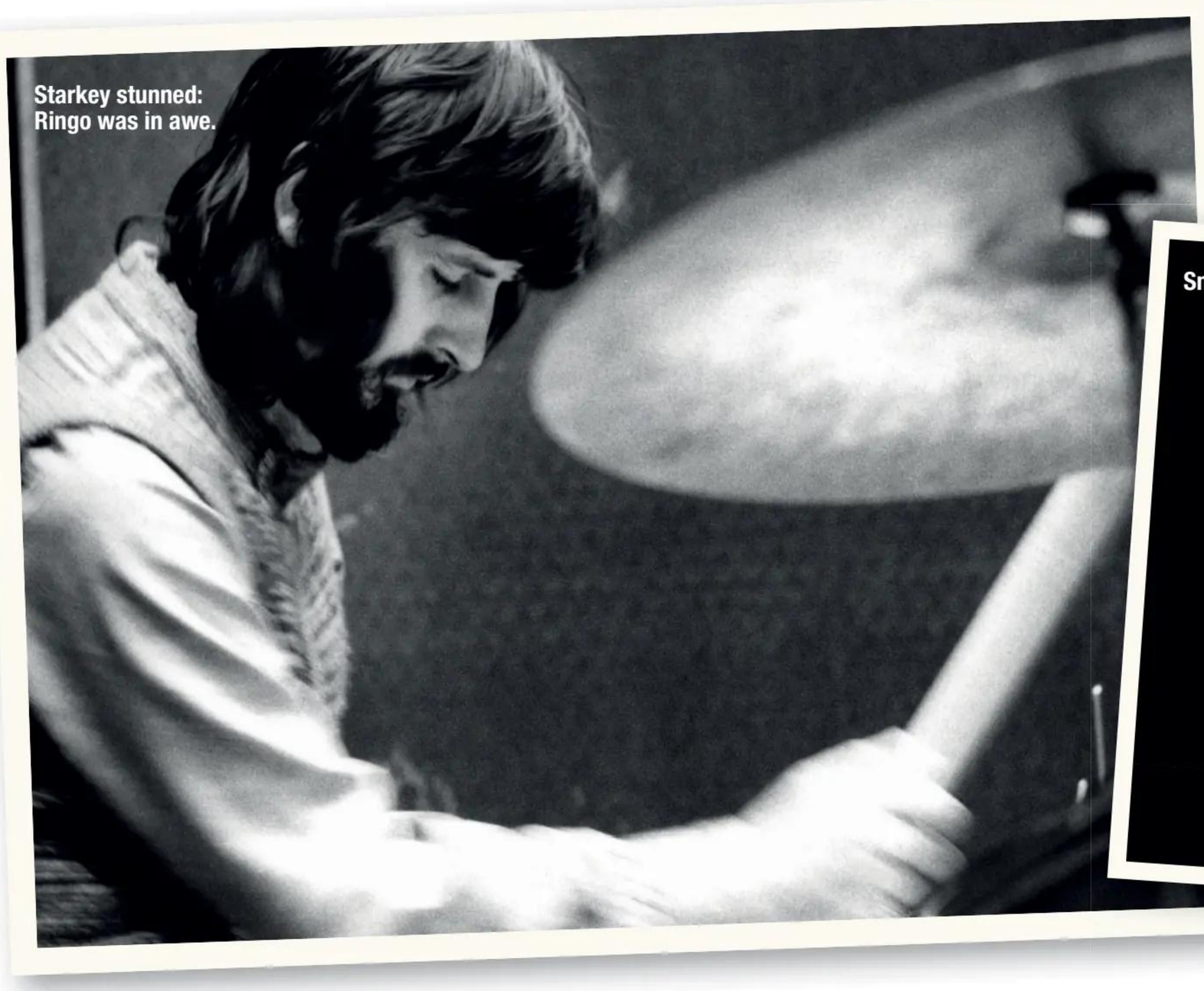
Glyn Johns was a famous, talented engineer with his own style, and to have a brash young kid saying, "That is not the sound I want," put us at odds.

I don't think he knew I'd been working at Chess since the mid-60s, starting as a janitor, then becoming an engineer and finally a producer. I had been trained by Willie Dixon and I knew exactly how to get the Chess sound.

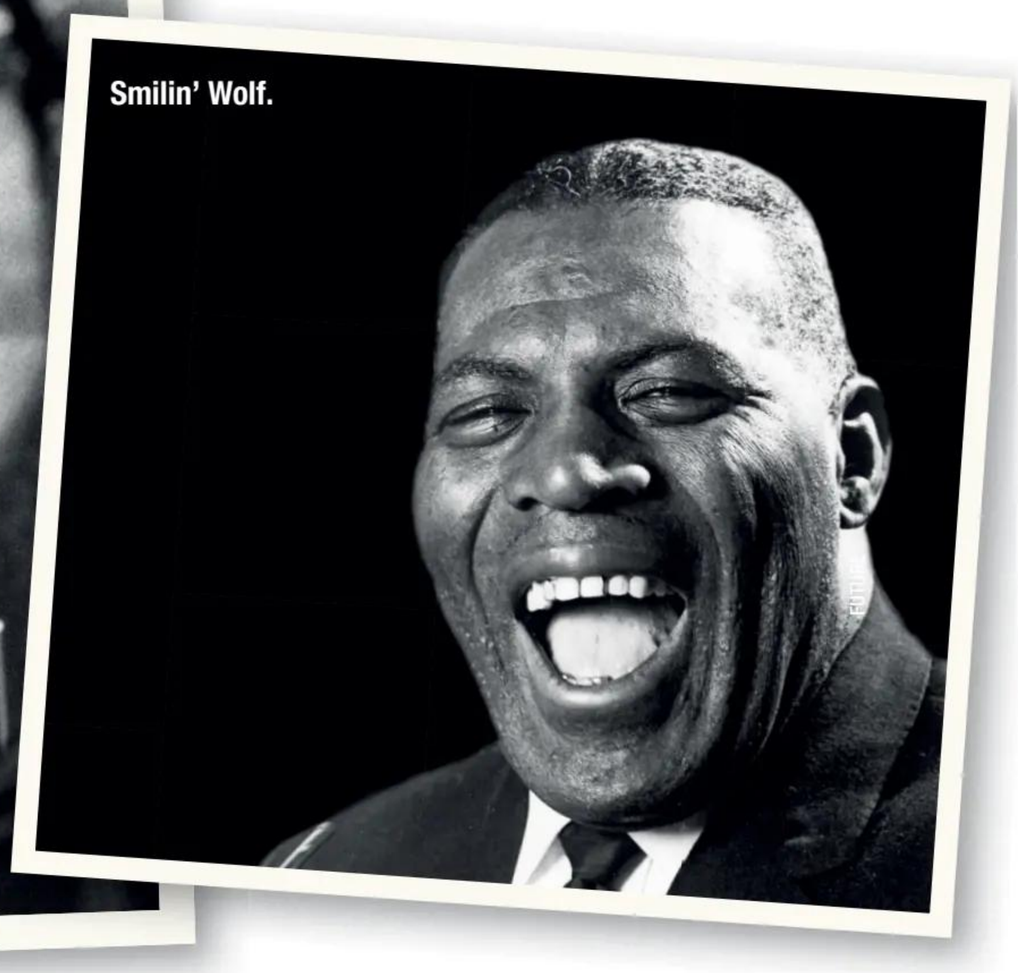
Glyn Johns: I threw him out of the control room on the first day, I remember. I banned him because he'd come in and play what we were going to do next. He'd get the [original] record out and put it on the turntable at the wrong speed and not realise that it was at the wrong speed. Can you believe it? So I said, "You! Out! I can't deal with you anymore. Get out of here."

Norman Dayron: It's true that we didn't get along at first, but he never threw me out of the control room. For a start, I was not the kind of producer who sat behind the desk in the control room and said, "Take one." I preferred to be out there with the musicians and you can see that in the photographs of the sessions.

But Glyn and I did have a number of



Starkey stunned: Ringo was in awe.



Smilin' Wolf.

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On the killing floor: Clapton heeds his master's voice.

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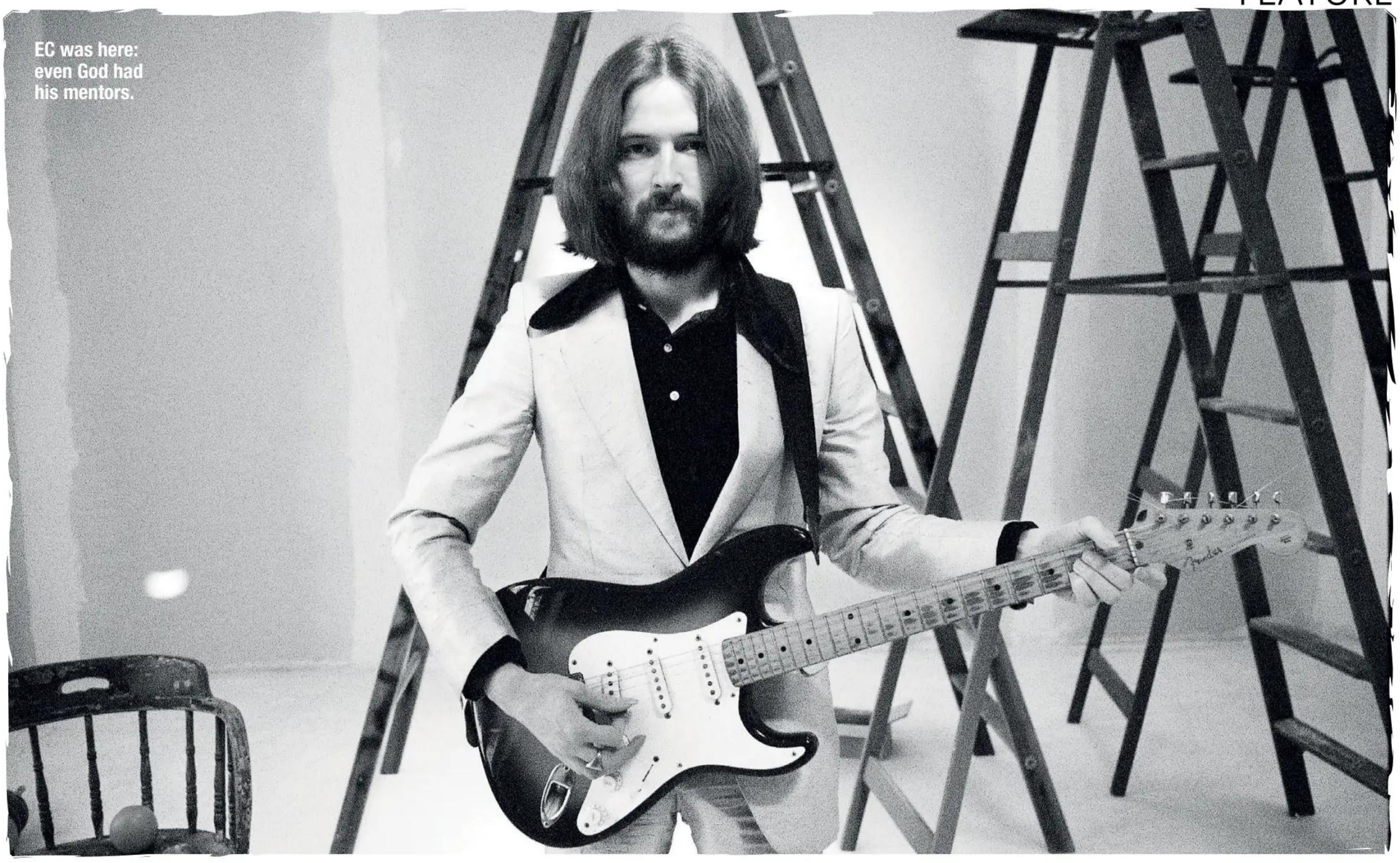
GETTY IMAGES



EC was here: even God had his mentors.

GETTY

back-and-forth discussions and finally I accepted that he had gotten enough of an idea of the kind of sound I was looking for that I could trust him to follow those precepts and it would be OK. I also knew I could work further on the sound when I got back to Chicago.

Hubert Sumlin: Wolf was on a dialysis machine right in the studio, with doctors tending him night and day.

Norman Dayron: I can't imagine where Hubert might have got that from. Wolf's problems at that time were with his heart, not his kidneys.

His problem was arrhythmia, which was easily controlled by prescription drugs. I had gone with him in Chicago to see his doctor, who knew him well. She gave the green light for him coming to London because otherwise he'd probably have taken his band down to play in some juke joint in Greenwood, Mississippi, which would have been much worse for his health.

So part of my responsibility on that trip was to make sure he took his pills.

A bigger problem on the first day was that Charlie Watts, who Eric had organised for the session, couldn't be there. I think Bill Wyman did show up, but he was not keen to play without Charlie. We put out an urgent call for musicians and the first pair to turn up were Ringo Starr and Klaus Voormann.

Klaus Voormann (bassist): Bill Wyman was definitely there that first day. I remember because I was surprised by how talkative he was. I'd only seen him on stage where he stood there with a straight face.

Norman Dayron: Bill was very keen to support the project but Ringo and Klaus knew each other and had played together often, so they were the obvious choice for that first day.

Klaus Voormann : Wolf sat on a chair, but there was no control coming from him. In fact, there was no control from anywhere.

I remember the whole band sitting there after having played a few takes. Howlin' Wolf was staring at the floor, sitting there like a statue, not moving an inch. He gave us no comment, so we didn't know, "Was it good? Was it bad? What shall we do?"

Eventually, Ringo very cautiously spoke into the drum mike in the direction of the control room: "Shall we try it a little..."

At that point, Howlin' stopped Ringo by lifting his right hand, with his left pointing at the control room, saying, "He's the producer."

> **Wolf took the microphone off the mike stand, walked up to us... looking us in the face with his dark eyes...**
>
> **KLAUS VOORMANN**

Norman Dayron: I was kind of pushy, so all through the sessions, when people would look to Wolf and ask for guidance, he would say, "Ask Norman. He knows what he wants. He's the boss." They had to ask me.

Klaus Voormann: Once we got started, Wolf took the microphone off the mike stand, walked up to us, bending down real close, looking us in the face with his dark eyes, singing his arse off. What power! What magic. What a great guy!

Ringo Starr: He was great. He was the Wolf Man. He was Howlin' fuckin' Wolf! We had all the baffles around the drums and I had the cans on and my eyes closed, playing to him and then suddenly it just seemed a bit... the air was hot coming across my face and I looked up and he was right over the baffles singing, right into me and the drums, so he didn't care about separation and I love that. So they're the memories. He was just, y'know, a gentle giant on those sessions.

Norman Dayron: Ringo and Klaus caught on right away to what we were trying to do. One of the best songs on there, *I Ain't Superstitious,* features Ringo and Klaus. They did a good job.

Eric Clapton: For the first couple of days, I was scared of The Wolf, because he wasn't saying anything to anyone. He just sat there in a corner and let this young white kid kinda run the show and tell everyone what to do. It was a bit strange.

Glyn Johns: Eric Clapton in those days wasn't quite the hero that he became.

THE CHICAGO OVERDUB SESSIONS

The blues crosses back across the Atlantic…

In the summer of 1970, Norman Dayron returned to Chicago, refreshed after a holiday in Spain, and settled down to make sense of the more than 20 reels of master tapes from London. It proved to be a more complicated experience than he had anticipated.

"First of all," he points out, "I wanted that funky Chess sound, but Chess was still using 12-track equipment, so they couldn't even play back the 16-track masters we'd made at Olympic. I decided to use RCA, out on Navy Pier, because they had the right equipment and old-time engineers, like radio engineers, who really knew how to get a great mono sound. Also, by using tape delay I could replicate the Chess sound."

Holding the sessions at RCA had a secondary benefit, inasmuch as it meant that, as an independent producer, Dayron could maintain control of the studio and prevent anyone from Chess interfering with the overdub process

Asked if Wolf himself attended the RCA sessions, Dayron states, "I invited Wolf to the studio, but he said, 'No, just let me hear it when you've got what you want.' If he'd heard anything he didn't like, he would have told me. In the event, when I played it for him, he thought it was fine."

Dayron had decided to use the horn section of Chicago-based harmonica player Jeff Carp's band, the 43rd Street Snipers, augmented by other sessioneers on guitars and piano.

Snipers' trumpet player Jordan Sandke, who, like Carp, was still a teenager, remembers, "It was me on trumpet, with Joe Miller [tenor/baritone saxes], Dennis Lansing [tenor sax], Paul Asbell [guitar] and Joel Smirnoff [piano]. All of us took part in the overdubs, although only the horns got credit. Paul and Joel got mentioned in the 'Special Thanks' on the original vinyl pressing."

Sandke deviates somewhat from the Dayron version of events, in which the producer had always intended to do overdubs, stating, "As I remember it, the reason the overdubs were added was that the original masters [for *I Ain't Superstitious* and *Built for Comfort*] were rather bland and uninspiring – perhaps because the British musicians felt intimidated by Wolf – one of their greatest heroes – and just couldn't relax enough to play at their funkiest level."

As Dayron recalls, "I sang the parts I wanted to them, and played the chords on the piano. I had worked with them before and they knew exactly the kind of arrangements I had in mind. They'd had the opportunity to listen to the rough cuts from London, so they offered their own refinements and suggestions, and added some things in."

Sandke confirms that he and the other Snipers then memorised their parts and taped them, with very little further direction. "I was just asked to play trumpet and hit the right notes at the right time... which was not always so easy for me back then."

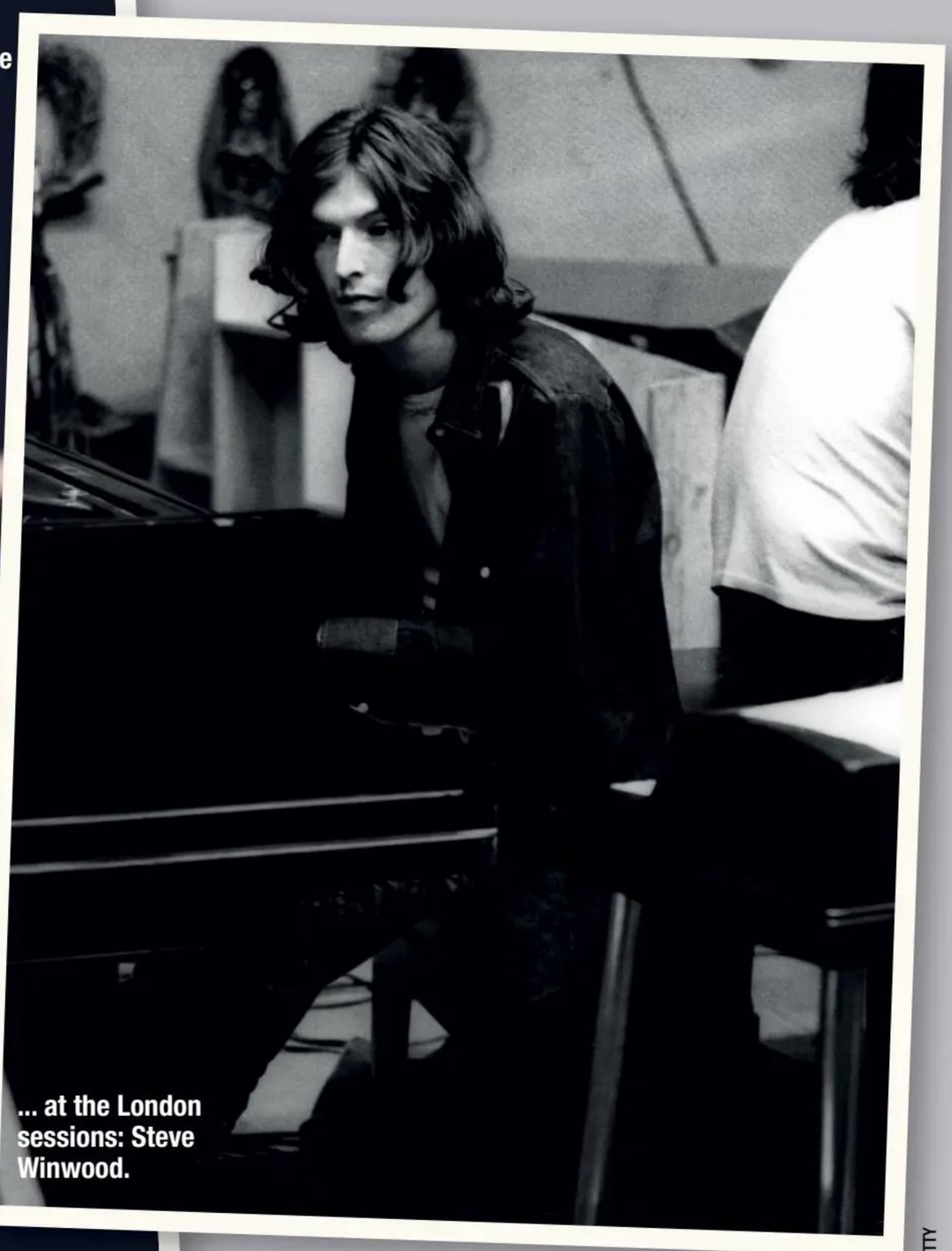
Another problem during the *London Sessions* had been that Hubert Sumlin's amp had been intermittently shorting out. It might seem odd then that, rather than letting Hubert correct his parts at the overdub stage, Dayron brought in the estimable Phil Upchurch. "Not at all," says Dayron. "Phil was a very sophisticated jazz player who could imitate anybody perfectly, Hubert included. Hubert was not used to working without Wolf, and unfamiliar with doing drop-ins cued to an overdub track, whereas Phil could do that easily. It would have taken much longer with Hubert."

Dayron also brought in revered Chess sessioneer Lafayette Leake to "fix up a few piano notes that were off, out of tune", but the main keyboard contributions were added later when Steve Winwood arrived in Chicago to play with Traffic at the Aragon Ballroom.

"I worked with Winwood on his own, in yet another studio," recalls Dayron, adding that he can't remember which. "I had a few parts, organ and piano, in mind, and there was no-one at Chess who was very familiar with the Hammond B-3. So I gave Steve a call because I figured he could do the organ and maybe even help me fix a couple of the out-of-tune piano problems. He was a dream to work with, and he contributed to *I Ain't Superstitious*, *Poor Boy*, *Highway 49* and a couple more."

One final mystery which Dayron is happy to clear up is that in the 'Special Thanks', as well as mentioning Asbell and Smirnoff, there's a thank-you to an enigmatic individual by the name of Be-Bop Sam, who seems to have made no other impact in the recorded history of the blues. Dayron chuckles at the memory. "People sometimes think he must have played guitar on the album. Actually, Be-Bop Sam was an obscure guitar player, something of a legend in Chicago, but unknown outside. He used to play in clubs from time to time, and on Maxwell Street. He wasn't a great guitarist but he was a real personality and everybody knew him. I thanked him in the credits but he never played on the sessions. It was kind of an inside joke."

At the Chicago sessions: Lafayette Leake...



... at the London sessions: Steve Winwood.

GETTY

He kept saying, "What the hell am I doing this for? Hubert Sumlin's in the control room. Why don't you get him to come and do it?" Eric didn't want to do it. He was very modest and was quite embarrassed too.

Norman Dayron: At the end of the day, Clapton asked if he should bother coming back. I said, "Don't worry, it'll be better tomorrow."

May 3, 1970: Olympic Studios. Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts take over as rhythm section, with Rolling Stones pianist Ian Stewart on piano.

Ian Stewart (keyboardist, Rolling Stones): The producer phoned me and asked me to help him set it all up. People do this. They come and pick your brains, they want you to help, and then say, "Well, if you do it, you can play piano." You know, rhubarb, rhubarb, so I played piano on all of that and then he went away and took the tapes to Chicago and got hold of Stevie Winwood and said, "Would you overdub piano because there's no piano on it?"

Norman Dayron: On the second day in Olympic, Wolf got surly. I don't think it was about the musicians. I think it was just his mood.

He was working with people that he had no real connection with. I think he was uncomfortable, and the way he expressed that was by being rather blunt and aggressive. He was like a fish out of water.

Wolf was prepared to work, but he was going to be surly about it.

We got through some good takes but there was still no real connection, there wasn't that magic in the room where people were having fun playing together and, without that, you've got nothing.

I later found out that he was drinking heavily and not taking his medicines.

However, I believe this was the day when we made a breakthrough, because Eric asked Wolf to show him the changes to *Little Red Rooster*.

Glyn Johns: We were going to cut *Little Red Rooster* and Eric said, "Well, I can't play that." Wolf looked across at him and said, "You've more or less got it." Eric said, "There's no way I can do that." And so Wolf got out a beat-up old f-hole acoustic guitar and he looked out at Eric and said, "Well, I'm going to teach you how to play it. Somebody's got to do it when I'm gone." The whole place froze.

Eric Clapton: It was a hairy experience. He came over and got hold of my wrist and said, "You move your hand up HERE!" He was very, very vehement about it being done right.

Norman Dayron: Of course, Eric knew the song back to front, but the way he put himself out, that's what really broke the ice on the sessions. It warmed Wolf up, to feel that they really needed him to show them what to do. They couldn't do it without him.

> **Wolf got surly... the way he expressed that was by being rather blunt and aggressive.**
>
> **NORMAN DAYRON**

Glyn Johns: [Wolf] sat and told stories for about two hours while Keith [Richards] sat there in the control room with me one night after the session – a lot of which I didn't understand because his accent was so unbelievably broad and some of his terminology was quite strange. I just nodded and laughed at the appropriate moment, just to keep him going.

May 4, 1970 : Olympic Studios, recording *Wang-Dang-Doodle*, *Rockin' Daddy* and *Poor Boy*.

Norman Dayron: Once Bill and Charlie took over the rhythm section, Mick Jagger was there all the time. He was very enthusiastic about getting involved but I really didn't know what instrument he could play. So, over the course of the sessions, I offered him a variety of different percussion instruments – guiro, maracas, tambourine and triangle. He had great timing and he did a good job.

I remember having a confrontation with Mick Jagger, which I didn't even know was a confrontation, because I was not well-versed in the subtleties of English societal irony and so on.

I think David Bowie and Lennon were there too that night. Mick had his

Original Chicago blues: The Wolf with his early band.

GETTY

hand on his hip, and his lips stuck out, and he said, "Well, Your Majesty, if you had to go to a desert island and could take only one record with you, what would it be?"

I gave it a little thought and said I would probably take *The Greatest Hits Of Ray Charles*, because I could listen to that forever. He said, "How boring, what an awful choice." So I asked what he would take and he mentioned a David Bowie album, I think it was *Ziggy Stardust*. It was an awkward moment, but we both ended up laughing about it and, again, it was an ice-breaking moment which bonded us a little better.

May 5, 1970 : Recording at Olympic ends in the early hours of the morning...

Norman Dayron : It was maybe two or three in the morning when we finished up the session and, as my musicians were getting into the cabs, I noticed that Howlin' Wolf was missing. So I went back into the studio, looked everywhere, called out for him very loudly, and couldn't find him.

Finally, I looked in the toilets, turned the lights on, and there was a row of wooden stalls with the one at the farthest end with its door closed. I had to bend down and look through the space, about eight inches, at the bottom of the door, and I saw this gigantic pair of size 14 shoes, with the white sweat socks that he always wore.

But the cubicle was locked and there was no response when I called out his name, so I had to bang on the door. I stuck my head right under and I could see him slumped over, evidently unconscious. He had turned an almost white-ish grey colour, his trousers were down around his knees, so all I could do was squeeze into the stall with him, and started to shake him.

I was thinking he must have had a heart attack and I was going to go down in history as the man who killed Howlin' Wolf.

Luckily, he came around quite quickly, and got quite angry. That I should be in the cubicle with him was beyond his imagination. He bellowed out, "What the hell are you doing in here?" That was a big relief, because at least he was alive, and had plenty of energy.

> **I was going to go down in history as the man who killed Howlin' Wolf.**
>
> **NORMAN DAYRON**

We spent the next eight hours or so in the nearest hospital, where they gave him every imaginable test, but there was nothing to suggest he'd had a heart attack.

He had simply passed out. He'd had a long day, he was an elderly man, I think he had been drinking again, so maybe he just nodded out.

As I recall, after he had a few hours sleep in The Cumberland, we went into Olympic, but nothing we recorded that night got used.

May 6, 1970 : Olympic Studios, recording *Sittin' On Top Of The World*, *Do The Do* and *Highway 49*.

Norman Dayron : One guy who really deserves credit on these sessions is Jeff Carp. He was a brilliant chromatic harmonica player who led a band called the 43rd Street Snipers. I had used him when I produced Muddy Waters' *Fathers And Sons* album, and I regarded him as the best young harmonica player around.

Jeff did some wonderful stuff on the *London Sessions*, and I had got his band signed to Capitol Records, so he had a great future ahead of him. Tragically, he was so elated by what he had achieved at Olympic that he went off on a holiday in the Caribbean with his girlfriend, Scarlet Grey, during which the captain of the ship went insane. He had taken an animal tranquilizer, PCP, and was chasing people around in a psychotic rage with a big butcher knife. So some people, including Jeff, jumped overboard. Being a New York City kid, he had never learned to swim, and he drowned in 10 feet of water by the dock where the boat was moored.

So his album never came out, and there went one of the greatest harmonica players who ever lived, at the age of 18.

GETTY IMAGES

May 7, 1970 : Olympic Studios, recording *Little Red Rooster, Killing Floor, Worried About My Baby, What A Woman, Built For Comfort, Who's BeenTalking?*

Norman Dayron: That final day was very productive and, with all of the rough edges smoothed out, everybody was locked in and enjoying themselves.

Hubert Sumlin: On *Little Red Rooster,* Wolf is playing the guitar and I'm right in the background. Wolf ended up playing the slide with a milk bottle but he was in a mess! Because he didn't have a slide he'd broken the end off and he'd cut his fingers bad, there was blood everywhere!

Norman Dayron: On the CD re-issues, you'll notice that the section with Wolf showing Eric how to play *Little Red Rooster* immediately precedes the full band version, but it's worth remembering that it actually happened several days earlier.

I was happy with what we'd achieved but really, there was no celebration for the end of the sessions. The English musicians did ask me what they might give Wolf as a parting gift and I suggested a fly-fishing rod, because he was a keen fisherman, but I really don't know for certain if they ever gave him one.

We just went back to the hotel, packed up and went home, just as we would have done at Chess at the end of a recording session.

Nobody came to see us off at the airport or anything like that. I made sure that Wolf and the others got on their flights, and then my girlfriend and I went off for 10 days in Spain before flying back to Chicago for mixing and overdub sessions.

When the album came out, initially the American purist blues magazines, which were all run by young white guys, didn't like the idea of mixing white musicians with black musicians. It really was a kind of racism, they didn't like white musicians being brought in. They were really snobs.

In later years, I'm pleased to be able to say, people have learned to listen to this album for its musical values and, on that basis, it is now regarded as a real breakthrough moment.

FROM *LONDON SESSIONS* TO LEGENDARY SESSIONS

When the *London Sessions* album was released in August 1971, it achieved producer Norman Dayron's aim of dramatically improving Wolf's profile by becoming his first – and last – album to reach the *Billboard* Top 100 Albums chart. Despite the participation of sundry Stones and Beatles, it disappointingly made no impact whatsoever on the British albums chart.

Peaking on the *Billboard* chart at a none-too-exciting No 79, which would have been disappointing for almost any of Wolf's white rock'n'roll sidemen, it was nevertheless a leap forward for Wolf and the blues in general. Indeed, it did well enough that in February 1974 Chess released *London Revisited,* a rag-bag cash-in project built around the original's success, consisting of three out-takes from Olympic Studios plus a few leftovers from Muddy Waters' 1971 London sessions. It also spawned several similar London-based collaborations, the most memorable being by Muddy.

However, as Dayron himself admits, *The London Howlin' Wolf Sessions* was not welcomed with open arms by the entire blues community.

Just as Wolf himself had expressed reservations about the notion of playing with white rockers, and Clapton had wondered out loud why he was needed at the sessions, so the blues purists of the critical fraternity were not best pleased by the collaboration.

The era of super-sessions had been ushered in back in July 1968 with the Mike Bloomfield, Al Kooper and Steve Stills album *Super Session,* a spontaneous set of live-in-the-studio jams by hot young players, all of them blues oriented, all of them white. It's worth remembering though that Chicago's pioneering Paul Butterfield Blues band was a mixed-race outfit from the get-go in 1963.

Gary Von Tersch's *Rolling Stone* review of *London Sessions* was kinder than most of the blues mags, rating it Wolf's "best album in years", hailing it as "among the most successful of these black-meets-white get-togethers" and describing the contents as "13 Blues-stellar performances".–

The UK's pop weekly *Disc,* however, wasn't so convinced. The whole of side one was dismissed as "disappointing, all a bit samey" and the final comment was, "Don't expect too much."

Bill McAllister's review in *Record Mirror* was headlined 'Wolf without teeth?' and summed it up as "not an exceptional album".

But times and opinions change, so by 1992 the *Rolling Stone* album guide was giving it four stars and calling it "a good late collaboration".

Come 1994, Robert Santelli's *Big Book Of The Blues* devoted almost three pages to Wolf's recorded output, and included *London Sessions* as "essential listening".

Evidence that interest in the *London Sessions* has never since waned came in 2003, when the two-disc Deluxe Edition put together by Universal sold well enough to hit No Six in the *Billboard* Blues Albums chart.

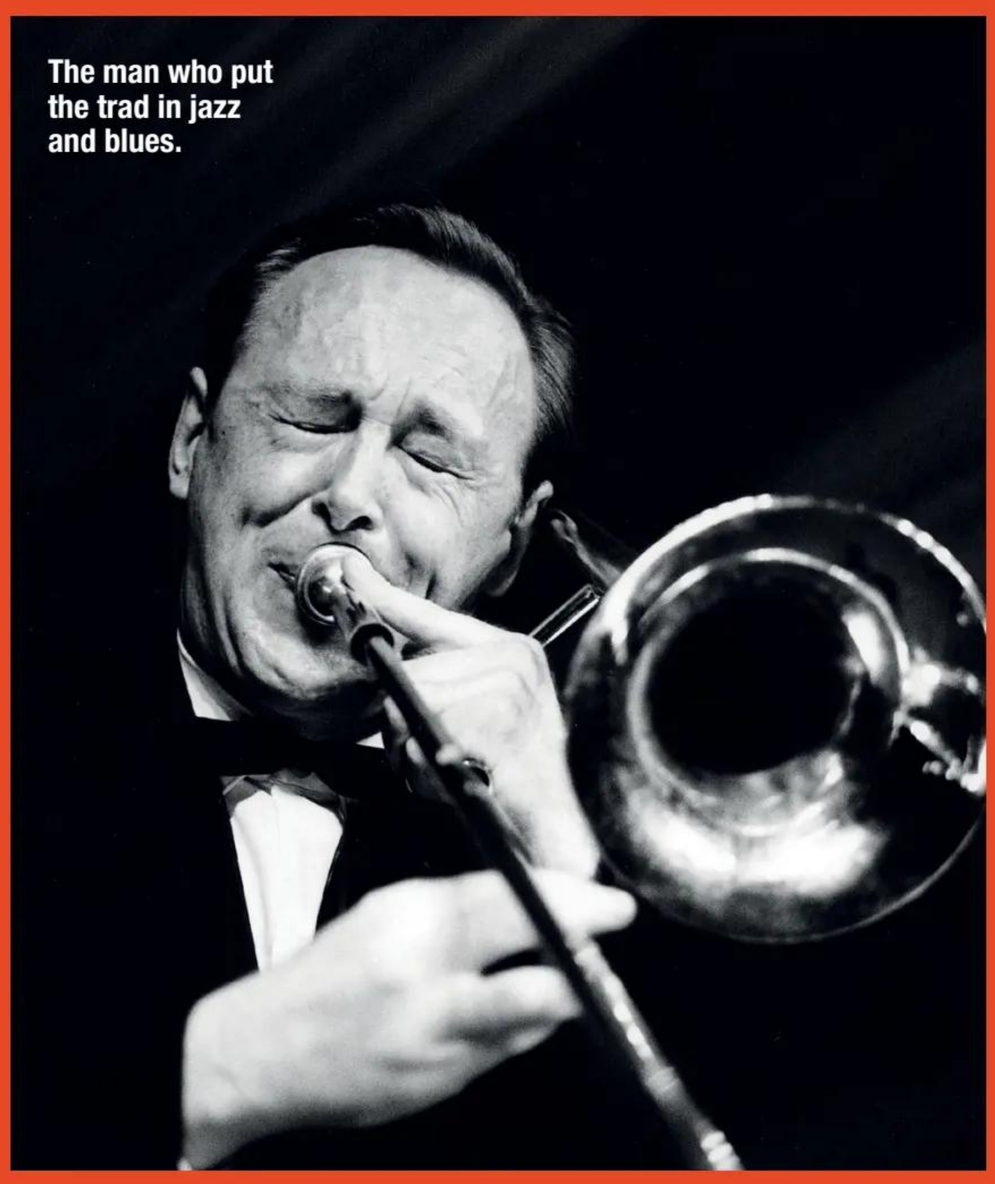
The controversy, however, continues to rage. The redoubtable Kub Coda on the All Music website pans it, saying, "while it's nowhere near as awful as some blues purists make it out to be, the disparity of energy levels between the Wolf and his UK acolytes is not only palpable but downright depressing".

Reverend Keith A. Gordon of About.com acknowledges the controversy, but concludes, "this most-maligned of albums from the great Howlin' Wolf's career sounds better than its most vocal critics dare to admit".

Was it a truly great album? It certainly wasn't Wolf at the peak of his powers. We know from contemporary reports, for example, that Norman Dayron had to hold lyric sheets up for him, and sometimes even whispered lines in his ear just before he sang because Wolf couldn't remember his own lyrics. His voice was a little less powerful, and he wasn't entirely comfortable with his accompanists, but the end result – listened to at a remove of some 40 years – still cooks, simmering with the same air of menace that made his earlier classics so gut-wrenchingly powerful.

CHRIS BARBER REMEMBERS WOLF'S FIRST TRIP TO THE UK

" Wolf & Hubert had gone to Europe first, with the American Folk Blues Festival. It was 1964, I think it was their first time overseas, and then they played with my band backing them on six or seven shows in England – The Marquee in London, Manchester Free Trade Hall and so on, plus we did the BBC Radio *Saturday Club* session. Despite his larger-than-life kind of ferocious onstage persona, he was gentle and fairly quiet offstage. He was happy with how we were playing his music; he was never difficult. He used to sit on the stage and practise guitar after sound checks, he was learning you see, always in the key of G! He was very serious about his music, very professional and business-like on the road. It was the custom when I played with the visiting American blues musicians for my wife and I [Ottille Patterson] to invite them to our house for dinner on a day off – Muddy, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGee, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Big Bill Broonzy – all kinds of people through the years, and Wolf was the only one out of the lot of them who insisted on saying grace before he ate, quietly to himself. Everybody else, especially the gospel singers, wanted to know where the whiskey was!"



The man who put the trad in jazz and blues.

GETTY

Jeff Beck: everything stops for tea.

Jeff Beck

From psych-rock rave-ups with The Yardbirds to heavy rock pioneer and jazz fusion maestro, he wrote the blueprint.

JEFF BECK, born June 24, 1944 in Wallington, Surrey is a singular talent. He started out playing blues and R&B before helping template hard rock, heavy metal and jazz fusion.

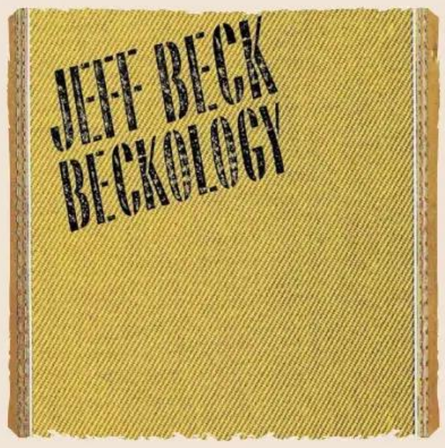
Enamoured with Les Paul, Gene Vincent, B.B. King and Steve Cropper, he honed his craft from 1963 in The Tridents, a four-piece led by the Lucas brothers, bassist and vocalist Paul and rhythm guitarist John. They blasted their Eel Pie Island audiences with R&B future classics and, while they never released a 45, their demo tape (hear it on *Beckology*, see opposite) proved they were ones to watch.

On joining The Yardbirds as Eric Clapton's replacement in 1965, Beck stamped his authority with psychedelic rock nuggets *Over Under Sideways Down*, *Happenings Ten Years Time Ago* and *Psycho Daisies*, the latter featuring Beck on lead vocals. His 1967 debut solo single, *Hi Ho Silver Lining*, made the UK Top 20, proof he could achieve success as a mainstream artist should he wish. He didn't, instead forming the Jeff Beck Group where he handed singing duties to Rod Stewart and, over two albums, 1968's *Truth* and 1969's *Beck-Ola*, provided the hard rock and heavy metal prototype. Later, 1972's *Jeff Beck Group* album, recorded with a reconfigured line-up in Memphis and produced by Steve Cropper, saw Beck try his hand at soul on covers including Ashford and Simpson's *I Can't Give Back The Love I Feel For You* and Stevie Wonder's *I Got To Have A Song*.

After a brief sojourn in Beck, Bogert & Appice – a supergroup of sorts, with Tim Bogert and Carmine Appice – he launched his solo career. On 1975's *Blow By Blow* and 1976's *Wired* he cemented his reputation as a jazz fusionist; 1993's *Crazy Legs* paid homage to Gene Vincent; 1999's *Who Else!* experimented with electronica; his most recent album, 2010's *Emotion & Commotion* placed him in an orchestral setting. It landed him his highest charting album in the UK at number 11, proving he's still very much a force to be reckoned with.

ALICE CLARK

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction



BECKOLOGY
Epic
Career retrospective of a guitar genius.

Hunt down this excellent three-CD box (released in 1991 but, sadly, currently out of print) for a comprehensive overview of Jeff Beck's career spanning 1963 to 1989.

Disc 1 covers the early years with three from The Tridents, an R&B group based in Chiswick, which Beck joined in 1963. Aligned to the Stones and Pretty Things, thanks to an authentic approach to playing the blues, their demos featured here, including *Trouble In Mind*, *Nursery Rhyme* and *Wandering Man Blues* capture a fledgling Beck already master of his instrument and pushing boundaries with the use of feedback. He continues to push forward with The Yardbirds from 1965 onwards; the heavy riffing on *Train Kept A Rollin'* hints at hard rock, *Hot House Of Omagarashid* views blues rock through a cross-continental lens; *Heart Full Of Soul*, *Shapes Of Things* and *Happenings Ten Years Time Ago* edge blues closer to the dawn of psychedelia.

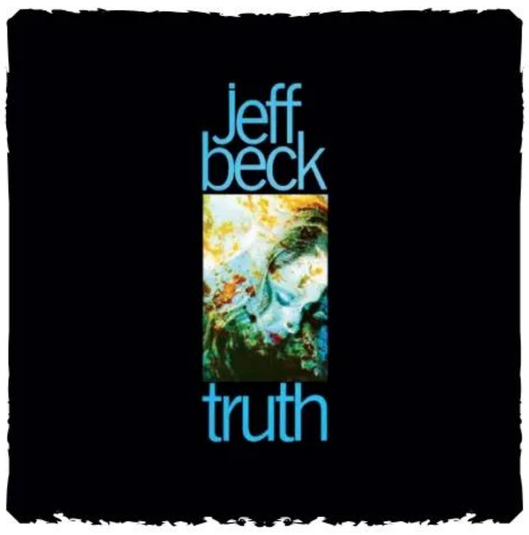
Disc 2 continues tracing his sonic journey, cherry picking from his two Jeff Beck Group albums, 1968's *Truth* and 69's *Beck-Ola*: tracks are raw, gritty and thunderous: see his reconfiguring of The Yardbirds' *Shapes Of Things* and the galloping *Plynth*, which paves the way for heavy metal.

Four songs from power trio Beck, Bogert & Appice (featuring bassist Tim Bogert and drummer Carmine Appice, both formerly members of Vanilla Fudge and Cactus), including their hit cover of Stevie Wonder's *Superstition*, bring the disc to a close.

Volume 3, meanwhile, collates Jeff Beck's solo years, and is rightly weighted towards his groundbreaking, George Martin-produced, *Blow By Blow* and *Wired* albums rooted in jazz fusion. Plus there are tracks (*Big Block, Where Were You*) from 1989 album *Jeff Beck's Guitar Shop*.

REX

SUPERIOR
The releases that built his reputation

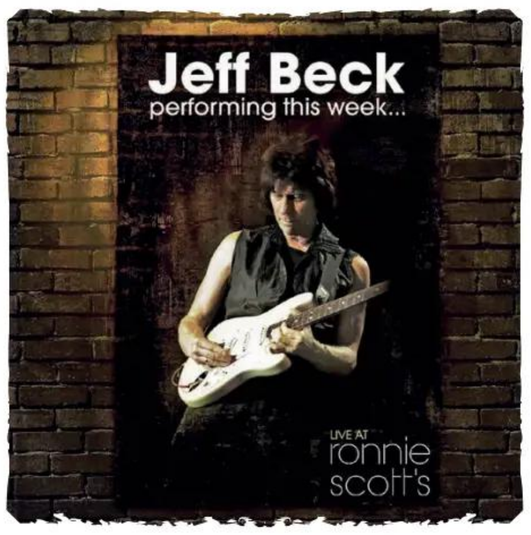


TRUTH
Epic
The blues-rock blueprint.

A pivotal release in the evolution of the blues, 1968's Mickie Most-produced first of two albums by the Jeff Beck Group Mk I (featuring vocalist Rod Stewart, bassist Ronnie Wood and drummer Micky Waller) provided a template for Led Zeppelin to build on. Rod's vocals are soulful; the songs – from Howlin' Wolf's *I Ain't Superstitious*, Muddy Waters' *You Shook Me*, plus rewrites of Buddy Guy's *Let Me Love You Baby* and B.B. King's *Rock Me Baby* (retitled *Rock My Plimsoul*) – are explosive and heavy. *Beck's Bolero*, originally recorded in 1966, features Jimmy Page, Keith Moon, John Paul Jones and Nicky Hopkins.

BLOW BY BLOW
Epic
The instrumental album.

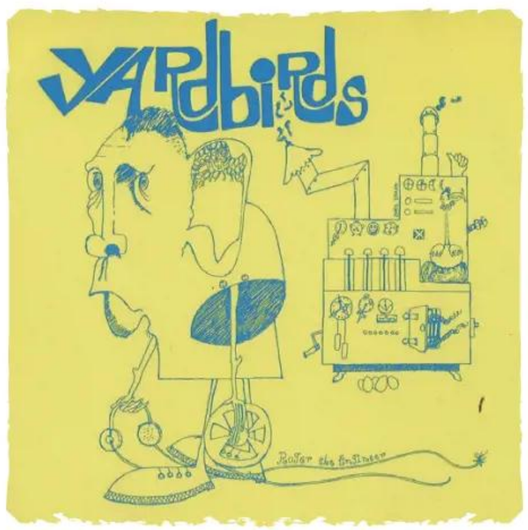
His first album under his own name, this 1975 outing forever altered the possibilities of blues and rock guitar with its progressive thinking and use of jazz improv. The credits are impressive, too: George Martin produces and arranges the strings, Stevie Wonder provides two of the nine songs – the beguiling ballad *Cause We've Ended As Lovers* and *Thelonious*, an homage to Monk, featuring Stevie on clavinet. The band – keyboard player Max Middleton, bassist Phil Chen, drummer Richard Bailey – are tight and Beck's soloing is some of his very best: see *You Know What I Mean* for proof.



PERFORMING THIS WEEK... LIVE AT RONNIE SCOTT'S
Eagle Rock
Live magic at legendary venue.

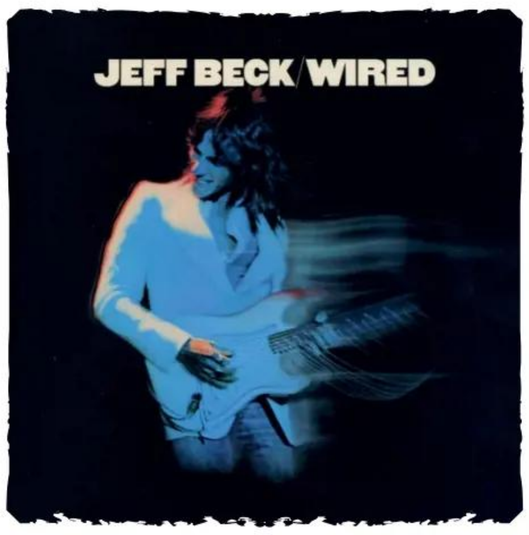
In 2007 at London's historic Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club, with the tapes rolling, Beck gave one of the performances of his life. With a crack band comprising keyboardist Jason Rebello, drummer Vinnie Colaiuta and bassist Tal Wilkenfeld, he brings the house down with a 16-track set spanning his career – a blistering *Beck's Bolero*, thrilling readings of *Cause We've Ended As Lovers* and *Led Boots*, and an exhilarating reimagining of The Beatles' *A Day In The Life*, which earned a Grammy for Best Instrumental Rock Performance.

GOOD
Worth a butcher's



THE YARDBIRDS /ROGER THE ENGINEER
Columbia
Pioneering psych rock.

Beck was rooted in the blues but after joining The Yardbirds he pushed the group forward, expanding their R&B and beat-based sound with feedback, distortion and fuzz tone to create an embryonic lysergia. This 1966 album (aka *Roger The Engineer*, after rhythm guitarist Chris Dreja's drawing of engineer Roger Cameron, which appears on the front cover) captures Beck in thrall to the call of the cosmos, laying the foundation for his mid-70s experimental thinking.



WIRED
Epic
Guitar and synth in harmony.

A benchmark in instrumental jazz-rock fusion, *Wired* extended the parameters set by *Blow By Blow*, with Max Middleton's *Led Boots*, an innovative tip of the hat to Led Zep and *Goodbye Pork Pie Hat*, Beck's exhilarating cover of Charles Mingus' ode to saxophonist Lester Young – both staples of Beck's live set. George Martin produces again, Jan Hammer provides intuitive synths and produces his own fervid *Blue Wind*. All eight tracks provide a springboard from which Beck takes full flight, making visionary grandstanding play with soaring solos and feedback.

AVOID
Like the plague

FLASH
Epic
Beck turns on the pop machine, with dire results.

The follow-up to 1980's long player *There & Back*, 1985's fourth solo album was a US Top 40 pop hit, and yielded Beck's biggest-charting single to date with *People Get Ready*, a cover of The Impressions song, voiced by Rod Stewart, which made the Top 5. Produced by Nile Rodgers and Arthur Baker, the rest of the album is a dud, however, stripped of its heart and soul by bland production, drum machines and the use of a vocoder. Flash the cash on something else.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

THE YARDBIRDS
Over Under Sideways Down
ROGER THE ENGINEER

Happenings Ten Years Time Ago/ Psycho Daisies
SINGLE

Heart Full Of Soul
SINGLE

Stroll On
HAVING A RAVE-UP (US)

JEFF BECK GROUP
I Ain't Superstitious
TRUTH

Rock My Plimsoul
TRUTH

Beck's Bolero
TRUTH

Blues Deluxe
TRUTH

JEFF BECK
Cause We've Ended As Lovers
BLOW BY BLOW

Thelonious
BLOW BY BLOW

You Know What I Mean
BLOW BY BLOW

Led Boots
WIRED

Blue Wind
WIRED

Goodbye Pork Pie Hat
WIRED

People Get Ready
SINGLE

Race With The Devil
CRAZY LEGS

Corpus Christi Carol
EMOTION & COMMOTION

Over The Rainbow
EMOTION & COMMOTION

A Day In The Life
PERFORMING THIS WEEK... LIVE AT RONNIE SCOTT'S

LEADER OF THE PACK

Among the many stars of London's mid-60s blues scene, one guy outshone and outplayed them all – Peter Green. Here, in interviews with John Mayall, Mike Vernon, former bandmates and the 'Man of the World' himself, we tell the story of how Fleetwood Mac were born.

Words: **Johnny Black**

Peter Green is, arguably, the most under-rated guitarist of the British mid-60s blues boom, consistently relegated to a position somewhere below the holy triumvirate of Clapton, Beck and Page. He deserves better. He would write some of the most memorable blues-based songs of the 60s, create some of the genre's most imaginative guitar licks and establish a band that, by the end of the decade, was out-selling The Beatles and The Stones.

Born in London's East End to a poor Jewish family, he had been turned onto the possibilities of guitar at the age of 11, in the skiffle era of the mid-50s. His brother Len acquired a cheap Spanish guitar and showed young Peter a few chords. Before long, it was Peter's guitar.

This is the story of how it all began for Peter Green, his first recordings and the creation of Fleetwood Mac.

August 11, 1965: John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, featuring Eric Clapton, play at Putney Pontiac Club in south-west London. Shortly after this gig, Clapton unexpectedly disappears to Greece for a two-week holiday.

John Mayall: I guess Eric just became bored with it. So he decided to get some friends together and go off to Greece. For me, it was panic stations because we'd come to rely on him so much and there were so few people to choose from as a replacement. I got a lot of replies to an ad I put in the *Melody Maker*, so I was auditioning different players every night, letting them sit in to see how they worked out. Then Peter came up to me during a gig at The Flamingo in Wardour Street and was fairly forceful, very insistent that he was better than the guy I had on stage that night, so I gave him a shot and he was quite right, of course.

Mike Vernon (Blue Horizon label founder and producer): Peter was an unknown quantity at this time. He had played in several local bands, the best known of which was perhaps The Muskrats, but he was not a big name.

Peter Green: John said I could play a little bit and he said, 'You've got the feeling', or something similar. Anyway, he let me on the train.

August 25, 1965: John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, featuring Eric Clapton, newly returned from Greece, play at Putney Pontiac Club.

John Mayall: Unfortunately, it was only a couple of weeks before Eric came back from Greece. Eric returned with a tan and Peter was out again. Peter wasn't very pleased about that, but that was the way it was.

Peter Green: I was only there for a week, and then I went with Peter B's Looners...

December 24, 1965: Georgie Fame And The Blue Flames, supported by instrumental band Peter B's Looners, led by organist Peter Bardens, play at The Flamingo. As well as Peter Green, the group also includes drummer Mick Fleetwood, both of whom will become founder members of Fleetwood Mac.

Mick Fleetwood: Peter came to audition... we were a very simple instrumental band, a lot of Booker T, Mose Allison. He had a great sound as they say, but me and the bassist, Dave Ambrose, didn't think he knew enough about the guitar. He only played a couple of licks, variations on a

theme, Freddie King. And to Peter Bardens' credit, he pulled me aside and said, 'You're wrong, this guy's special.'

April 29, 1966: Peter B's Looners play at The Carousel Club, Farnborough, with an augmented line-up including vocalists Rod Stewart and Beryl Marsden. They have been brought in, at the behest of Flamingo owners Rik and John Gunnell, hoping not just to expand the band's musical range, but to create a white soul 'supergroup'.
Dave Ambrose: When Rod Stewart and Beryl Marsden came in as singers, the band changed to Shotgun Express, doing mainly soul and Tamla Motown songs.

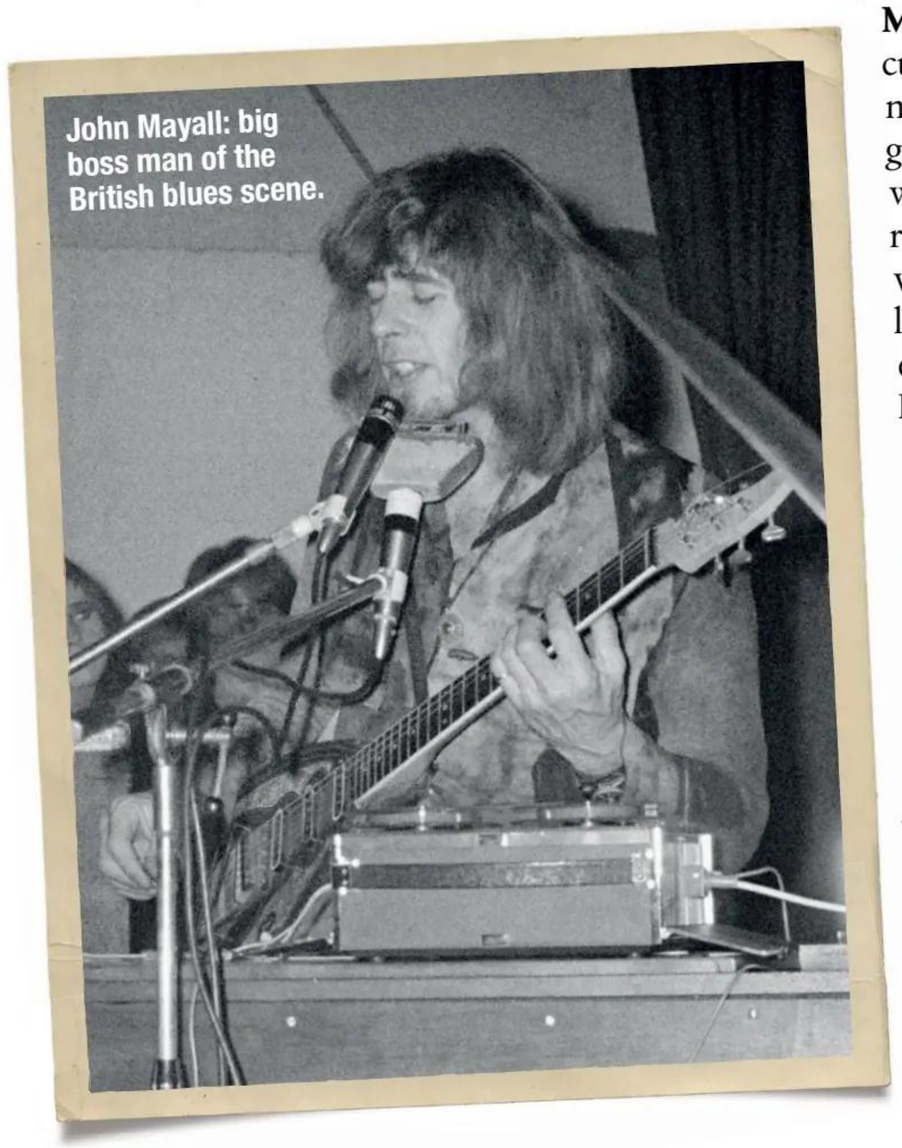
May 6, 1966: Shotgun Express play at the Beachcomber club in Nottingham.
Beryl Marsden: The music hadn't happened organically. We had been rather manufactured. There was a lot of money out there to be earnt in the clubs we played, like The Flamingo in Soho, and The Ram Jam Club in Brixton, but we didn't see big wage packets at the end of the hard week's work, and that led to discontent, too.
Dave Ambrose (bass): We did a single on Columbia [*I Could Feel The Whole World Turn Round*] which was a minor hit but, shortly after a lot of soul searching on his part, Peter left.

June 17, 1966: With Eric Clapton having abandoned Mayall's Bluesbreakers again, Peter Green is drafted in to replace him once more.
John Mayall: With Peter back in the band, the way we played stayed pretty much the same. As long as you have the same rhythm section then things don't change that much – it's when you lose a bass player that you're in trouble.
Peter Green: I bumped into John Mayall on the road and he said, 'Eric Clapton's going to form Cream, with Ginger and Jack. Do you want to come with me and get some experience? And be a blues band again instead of trying to be Booker T & the M.G.'s?'
John Mayall: He was a little hesitant at first because he'd been offered a job with Eric Burdon which entailed going to America, which Peter had always wanted to do, but the music Burdon was playing wasn't as attractive to Peter as playing blues, so he opted to come back with me.

July 22, 1966: John Mayall's Bluesbreakers release a new album, *Blues Breakers: John Mayall With Eric Clapton*, which had been recorded before Peter Green replaced Clapton.
John McVie: It was done at Decca studios in West Hampstead in less than a month. We played together a lot as a band, so we'd just go in and do takes live, with no overdubs. And as soon as the session was finished, we'd be out to gig. After the album came out a strange situation developed, because this upstart guy named Peter Green started playing with Mayall. There were guitar style wars going on between them – all that stuff about 'Clapton Is God' being sprayed on the walls was real!

July 24, 1966: John Mayall's Bluesbreakers play their first proper gig with Peter Green, at the Britannia Rowing Club, Nottingham.
Mick Fleetwood: He went immediately for the human touch, and that's what Peter's playing has represented to millions of people – he played with the human, not the superstar touch.

October 11, 1966: John Mayall's Bluesbreakers are in Decca studios with producer Mike Vernon recording *A Hard Road*. The sessions take five days in total, spread over a month.
Mike Vernon: All three Decca studios were custom-built by Decca boffins. The smallest, no.2, was used primarily for pop and group sessions, and had a really cool vibe... it was compact and vision between the control room and the main studio area was excellent. The sound achieved was never less than great but it did depend largely on the engineer. Working with engineer Gus Dudgeon made sense to me as he was very much into the music.


John Mayall: big boss man of the British blues scene.

"ON A PERSONAL LEVEL PETER WAS A MUCH EASIER GUY TO WORK WITH THAN ERIC."
JOHN MAYALL

I am reasonably sure that I had not met Peter prior to his arrival at West Hampstead.

Me and Gus were looking at him and thinking, 'Who the hell is this? Where's Eric?' John Mayall just said, 'Oh, he's Eric's replacement.' I hadn't even heard that Eric had left The Bluesbreakers. John said Peter was as good as Eric, which was a bit hard to believe until he actually plugged in and then we thought, 'Ummm, he can play a bit!'

Initially, Peter seemed like a very quiet and somewhat reserved kind of guy... not outspoken or aggressive in any way.

He must have felt somewhat awkward, though, following in Clapton's footsteps. As the sessions progressed, Peter became a little more certain of his role as a Bluesbreaker... especially when he was given the chance to exercise his vocal chords. He certainly was not as reluctant to sing as his predecessor had been... he seemed to really enjoy that role and he was very good.

When I heard Peter sing *The Same Way* for the first time, I thought 'Wow!'. Here is a great blues singer, no inhibitions about singing with an English accent, expressive and individual. I had a feeling that Peter was destined to make his mark in the music business.
John Mayall: Peter was every bit as good in the studio as he was on the road. He just nailed it. I didn't need to give him any instructions. I chose him for his individuality, for the way he played, so why would I try to direct him? The only thing he actually wrote for the album was the instrumental, *The Supernatural*, but that was a great piece of music.
Peter Green: Mike Vernon came up with the idea for *The Supernatural*. He said he'd seen this guitarist who'd played a high note, sustained it and then let

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it roll all the way down the neck. But I played it and I decided on the sequence.

Mike Vernon: That was a major departure in sound and feel from anything we'd done with Eric. The fluidity of his playing was quite awe-inspiring. He seemed to have a natural ability to string together notes and phrases that worked straight away. There was little time spent on working out what he was going to play, either because he had already figured out what he was going to do in advance or the 'moment' took over and it just happened! In my estimation, Peter Green was just the very best blues guitarist this country has ever produced.

February 17, 1967: John Mayall And The Bluesbreakers release the album *A Hard Road*.

John Mayall: People often ask me about the differences between Peter and Eric, but I don't judge guitarists by the number of notes they play. I just want them to have something moving and original to say. On a personal level, though, Peter was a much easier guy to work with than Eric. Very easy-going and fun-loving, great to be around. He became a really good friend.

April 19, 1967: John Mayall And The Bluesbreakers record *Double Trouble* in London, but the song will not appear on the next album, *Crusade*, because of Green's departure from the band.

Mike Vernon: John really rated Peter's playing as well as his vocal prowess. Peter kept telling me he was fed-up with The Bluesbreakers and wanted to put his own unit together.

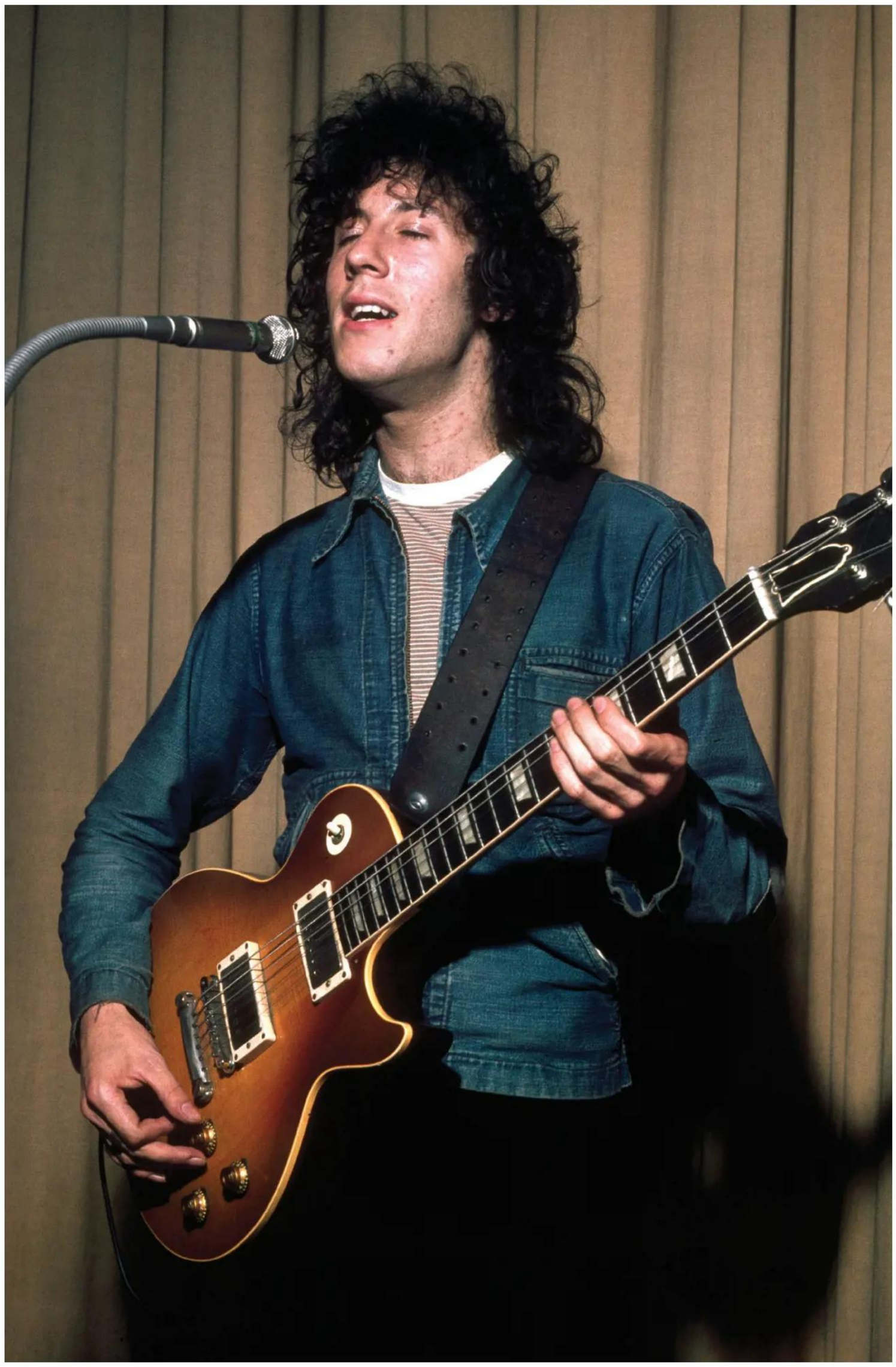
Mick Fleetwood: From the beginning he was a stickler about it not being all about him, but all about the band. That spirit was so important.

Mike Vernon: It just sort of snowballed, to the point where Peter was going to leave John Mayall and form his own band. He said to me, 'I want you to record our records and I want them out on your label, Blue Horizon. I don't mind if we're with Decca, but I don't want it on any other label but Blue Horizon.'

Neil Slaven (author and record producer): Mike and I were school friends. We'd formed a blues society at school, and in 1966 we had formed a label together called Blue Horizon, which was mail-order to start with. We did singles at first, and then albums. If you did 100 or fewer copies you didn't pay tax. The next thing was that we started the Blue Horizon Club in Battersea. Mike was already thinking about leaving Decca, and Peter had been doing slide acoustic gigs for us at the club. I remember him saying, 'For two pins I'd give all this up and start a pet shop.' There was always this other side to him that was detached, as if he was watching himself going into it.

Mick Fleetwood : We had no manager, so we did everything ourselves, and Peter did all the negotiations with Blue Horizon.

Jeremy Spencer (guitarist, Fleetwood Mac): In early spring of 1967, I was playing guitar in The Levi Set, in Lichfield, Staffordshire. Unbeknownst to me, my friend Phil had answered an ad in *Melody Maker*, which said that Mike Vernon was scouting Britain for blues talent. Mike came up to see us, and we did a 30-minute set and he was impressed and enthusiastic. He later arranged a session at Decca for us to record about four tracks. While there, Mike told me that Peter Green was quitting John Mayall's Bluesbreakers to form his own band and wanted to find another guitarist. Mike then arranged for us to play for half an hour between the sets of an upcoming John Mayall gig at Birmingham's Le Metro club, so Peter could see and hear me play.



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June 11, 1967: John Mayall's Bluesbreakers play at Le Metro, Birmingham, supported by The Levi Set.

Jeremy Spencer: I walked up to Peter to introduce myself. He said 'Jeremy? Jeremy Spencer?' before I said anything. I said I was and asked him if he listened to Elmore James. He said, 'Yes, all the time. Do you listen to B. B. King?'

I said I did, and we chatted until it was time for their set. I had seen John Mayall's Bluesbreakers with Peter Green some months previously and had enjoyed it. Anyway, the Levi Set played for about half an hour between Mayall's sets. I was happy that a good time had been had, but I pretty much discounted any idea of Peter wanting me in his new band. To my surprise, however, Peter asked if I wanted a drink, and as we stood by the bar, he talked as though I was already in it! He was saying stuff like, 'Well, you can do a couple of Elmore things and then I do a couple of B. B.'s and so on like that…'

I finally said, 'Are you serious? Do you like what I play?' He said I was the first guitarist that made him smile since Hendrix! Knowing that Peter disdained speed-freak guitar playing, I said, 'But he's fast. I'm not.'

He said, 'It's not the amount of notes

Ready to shake their moneymakers (l-r): Peter Green, John McVie, Jeremy Spencer and a very relaxed Mick Fleetwood.

you play. It's what goes into the notes.'

Then he showed me a page that he had written in his notebook on his way up to Birmingham. It was like a prayer that said something like, 'I can't go on with this music like it is. Please have Jeremy be good, please have him be good.'

Peter Green: I could see he was a little villain, you know? I thought I'd give it a try.

Neil Slaven: It was Jeremy and Mick who initiated all the madness in Fleetwood Mac. Peter seemed to enjoy it, but he didn't really join in. But Peter needed someone like Jeremy around to inject something extrovert into gigs that he knew he couldn't provide.

June 15, 1967: Peter Green quits John Mayall's Bluesbreakers.

John Mayall : I was disappointed when Peter left, because he was really a special player, but his heart wasn't in it so much, because we were leaning more towards jazzier elements.

Mike Vernon: I don't think Peter found it that easy to be the 'boss' of Fleetwood Mac. There were a lot of issues at the onset. He couldn't get John McVie to leave Mayall and so Bob Brunning took the bass player spot. I do think that Mick also played an important part in holding the unit together. He had a keen sense of how things should be done and, in that area, he and Peter usually agreed.

Mick Fleetwood: Peter and I came from very different backgrounds. He was an East End lad with a chip on his shoulder - a Jewish boy who got beaten up. He got away from it, but it caught him up in the end when it all went wrong.

> "PETER WAS STRAIGHTFORWARD, INTUITIVE AND A DEEP THINKER."
> JEREMY SPENCER

August 14, 1967: Fleetwood Mac make their debut on the third day of the National Jazz and Blues Festival, Windsor. Cream, Donovan, Jeff Beck, PP Arnold, Alan Bown, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Chicken Shack, Blossom Toes, Pentangle and Denny Laine are on the same bill.

John McVie: I wasn't the bass player with Fleetwood Mac that night; I was playing with John Mayall, who was headlining. Peter Green was harassing me to join the band, and I said, 'No, I'm fine playing with John'.

Stan Webb (guitarist, Chicken Shack): Peter and me were talking about the price of beer. Peter was wearing a white T-shirt and blue jeans, and Eric Clapton came over to us wearing a bed spread, rings on every finger, his frizzy hair sticking out six inches, and said to Peter, 'You'll never be a star if you dress like that.' Peter just smiled. And that sums it up.

Jeremy Spencer: Peter was straightforward, intuitive and a deep thinker. I think I brought to the band a kind of happy-go-lucky bawdiness, I suppose, but we related on musical and even what could be termed mystical wavelengths. We still do, in a similar way, during our infrequent interactions on the telephone.

August 28, 1967: John Mayall's Bluesbreakers play at The Marquee, London. This will prove to be John McVie's last gig with the band.

John McVie: At the time John had horn players in the band, and we were rehearsing at some club when John turned to one of them and said, 'Okay - just play it free-form there.' I said, with typical blues snobbishness, "I thought this was a blues band, not a jazz band!" I immediately went across the street, called Peter, and asked if he still wanted me to join up. I joined Fleetwood Mac in September '67.

September 9, 1967: In a secret session at Decca studios in New Bond Street, London, Fleetwood Mac record three tracks – *I Believe My Time Ain't Long*, *Rambling Pony* and *Long Grey Mare*.

Mick Fleetwood: Mike used his key to the studio to record us after hours.

Mike Vernon: We recorded it extremely late at night, in the big studio at Decca. We shouldn't have been there, when nobody at Decca knew we were doing it.

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TALKIN' TRASH

Our consulting editor casts a critical eye over Dog And Dustbin.

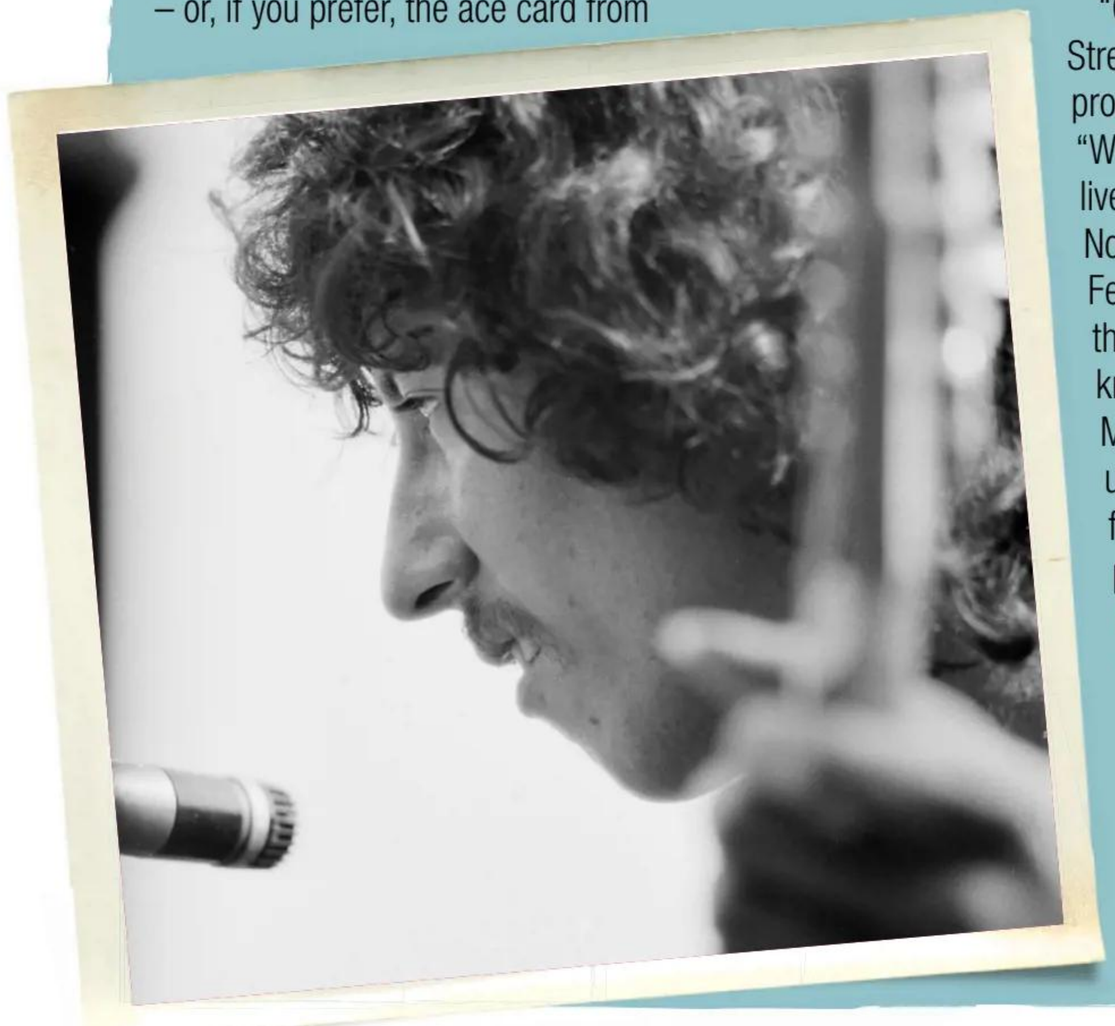
Words: **Charles Shaar Murray**

Most albums are referenced by their titles, or an abbreviation thereof. Others attract nicknames. The Beatles' 1968 double album, officially entitled simply *The Beatles* is generally known, for obvious reasons, as the White Album; John Mayall's *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* as Beano for the kids' comic EC is perusing on the cover…

Fleetwood Mac's debut, simply called *Fleetwood Mac*, will be forever known as Dog And Dustbin.The cover depicts a dingy alleyway, with the iconic mutt nosing around the equally iconic trash can. The graffito-style whitewash of the band's name, on the grimy brickwork wall, was rather obviously added at the artwork stage after the photo was taken. No psychedelic rococo Art Deco blobbage, no revolutionary posturing, no group shot with pretty clothes and lovely hair here, mate; this was defiantly presented as Gritty Urban Realism. This was the blues.

Peter Green had been catapulted to the forefront of Britain's blues-rock guitar ranks as the rabbit John Mayall had pulled out of his hat – or, if you prefer, the ace card from up Mayall's sleeve – after Eric 'God' Clapton had gone walkies from Mayall's Bluesbreakers in 1966 to go all paisley and acid with Cream. Green had won his spurs by replacing the allegedly irreplaceable. Now it was his turn to quit Mayall's stern employ and form a group of his own.

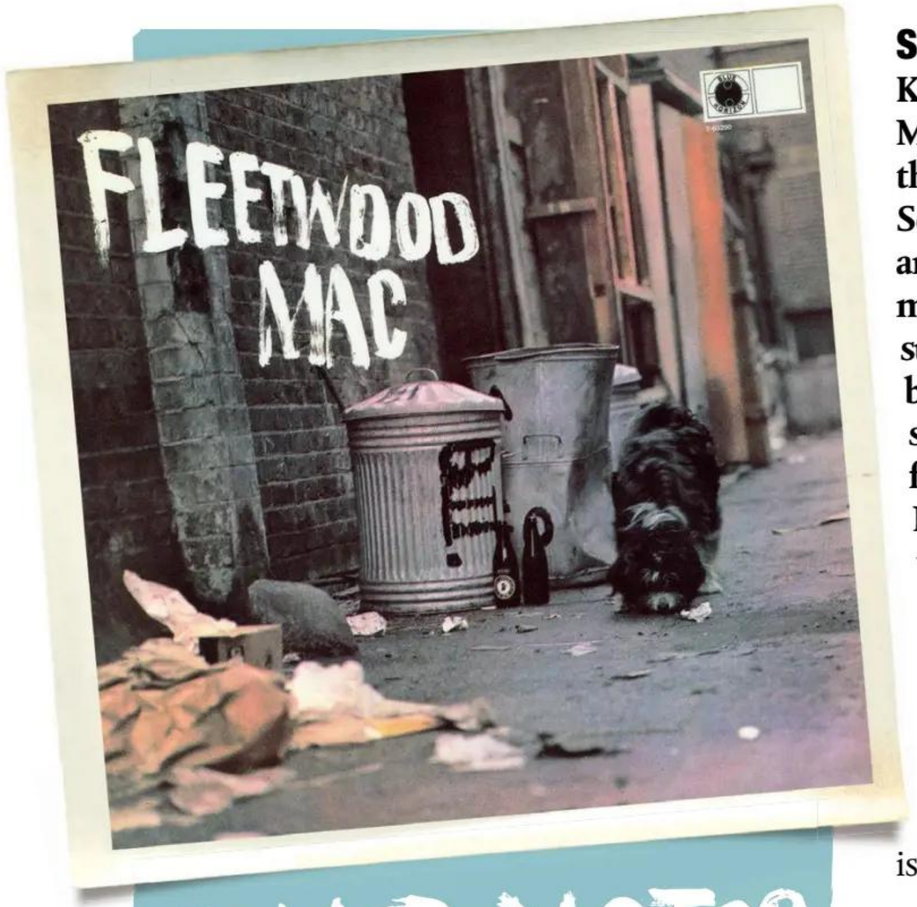
Mike Vernon, Mayall's producer for Decca, had also struck out on his own to form the Blue Horizon label, and Green's new band would be his flagship act. Green may have seemed like a cocky Bethnal Green 'erbert, but he was also remarkably self-effacing: he named his group after the rhythm section (drummer Mick Fleetwood and bassist John McVie – even before he joined), and shared the front line with young singer/guitarist Jeremy Spencer, whose belting Elmore James pastiches and clownish 50s rock routines provided a massive contrast to Green's austerely soulful performances.



"Our first session in CBS's Bond Street studio wasn't a big production," says Mick Fleetwood. "We went in, set up and played our live set." Cut over three days in November 1967 and released in February 1968, the first album by the group briefly (if unwieldily) known as Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac with Jeremy Spencer was an unexpected smash: it spent over four months in the UK Top 10, peaking at No.4, and was acclaimed by *Melody Maker* as "the best English blues LP ever released here".

Was it? Well, it was certainly a startling revelation of Peter Green's vocal and instrumental prowess, both on taut, riff-driven pieces like *Long Grey Mare* and *Looking For Somebody* and racked, monumental slow-blues epics like *Merry-Go-Round* and *I Loved Another Woman*. All Green's stuff on the album was performed bare-bones, backed only by the Mick 'n' Mac rhythm section and garnished only with the odd harmonica overdub. Spencer never played behind Green, though on the roaring, rocking Elmore James evocations which represented most of his contributions, Green supplied exemplary rhythm guitar. They really were two different groups, depending on who was up front. The difference was that – charming and infectious as Spencer's showcases were, and an arresting contrast to Green's needlepoint dourness – when you listen to Jeremy Spencer, sooner or later you always end up wishing you were listening to the real Elmore James; when you hear Peter Green, despite the frequent allusions to both B.B. King and Hank Marvin, you're only hearing Peter Green.

Hit singles follow not too long after, but Fleetwood Mac had demonstrated that a band could have a hugely successful album before ever troubling the pop singles chart. That success kick-started a 'blues boom' of sorts, of which fellow Blue Horizon act Chicken Shack were the chief beneficiaries. However, one wonders how musical history would have been altered had Peter Green billed himself as a solo artist or named his band after himself (as many would have preferred him to do) and not shared the spotlight so generously. Instead, he left Mick 'n' Mac with a name which would long outlast his tenure, and enable them to survive his own precipitous departure and ultimately achieve even greater success as an almost unrecognisably different band.



COVER NOTES

The celebrated Dog and Dustbin cover

Anyone who didn't notice the self-effacing humour of Fleetwood Mac in 1968, didn't look closely enough at the cover of the album. Not for them some grainily 'authentic' pic of the fivesome looking grizzled and undernourished, clutching their axes like weapons of war. Instead it portrays a border collie sniffing around a dustbin in a dingy back alley.

So? Well, the third track on the album is *Hellhound On My Trail*. How much more clearly could they say it? This was a band owning up - 'We're white boys from London playing the blues.'

Little wonder, then, that the photograph eventually bestowed the album with its nickname 'Dog and Dustbin'.

As Mike Vernon recalls, "It was taken by Terence Ibbott, somewhere in Camden Town, I think. The dog's name was Scruff and it belonged to my first wife, Judith."

Keen-eyed cover art aficionados may also have noticed Ibbott's name as photographer and sometimes designer on albums by Chicken Shack, Savoy Brown, Sunnyland Slim and others.

An indicator of the lack of sophistication available to album cover designers in them days is the name of the band which, at first glance, appears to have been grafitti'd onto the wall behind the dustbins with cheap white paint. Look closer and it's actually been added in the art department studio, with just a bare-minimum of effort put into making it appear to bend round the outcrops in the misshapen wall. Any 10-year-old with access to Paint Shop Pro could do a better job today. Back then, of course, none of us looked that closely and, in the end, it was the stuff inside the cover that mattered.

September 19, 1967: Fleetwood Mac plays at Klook's Kleek, West Hampstead, London, UK. Mike Vernon : I spent many hours following them around the club and university circuits. Seeing them working in front of an audience and gauging the latter's reaction to new and old material helped in deciding what to record. In summary, I would say that Peter had to work at being the 'boss'...once he was at ease with that situation, everything moved forward at a faster pace and with better results.

Mick Fleetwood : Peter would come over and whip me! 'It ain't fuckin' swingin'! You ain't puttin' it where it should be!' He would treat me like a dog, but that's all it took. 'I know you can do it, just do it.' 'Just feel it, buddy!' Everything I am musically I owe to Peter. I am more capable technically than I appear, but that's a lesson well learnt from this man: less is more, more is less.

November 3, 1967: The first UK single by Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac, I Believe My Time Ain't Long, is released.

Mike Vernon: The very first demos had been offered to Decca, and they weren't rejected, but they wouldn't put the record out on the Blue Horizon label so we offered it to CBS, who took it and took the label identity as well. But once that record came out and was something of a success, I got the dreaded phone call from the seventh floor at Decca, got called in and was told, 'You can't produce records for other record companies!' I said, 'Well, I did offer it to you and you rejected it, so I took it to someone else'. And they said, 'OK, fair enough, but you can't do these two things at once, so you either have to resign or we'll fire you!' So I said, 'Right, I resign as of now,' went away, and about three weeks later I came back and signed an independent production deal with Decca....

Mick Fleetwood : Peter saved my bacon on more than one occasion. One night at The Marquee, we'd had a few drinks, we were jamming, and I'd got over-adventurous and came out of it the wrong way. I'd lost track of whether I was on the off-beat or the on-beat, but Peter always knew, so he was laughing at me. I was completely lost, but I kept going of course, until Peter came back, grabbed my wrist and put me back in time. He was my mentor, my partner, and my friend. That was my training ground. I didn't really have a lot of confidence. I was going around with Aynsley Dunbar, the drummer of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, who was an incredible drummer, and still is. I had sort of a humorous self-effacing element to me, and Peter was a great encourager of it. He told me that it was one of the best things about my playing.

November 22, 1967: Fleetwood Mac are in CBS Studios, New Bond Street, London, recording *Merry Go Round, Hellhound On My Trail, I Loved Another Woman, Cold Black Night, The World Keeps On Turning, Watch Out, A Fool No More, You're So Evil* and *Mean Old Fireman*. Most of these tracks will appear on their debut album.

Mike Vernon: I don't think Peter was very interested, at that time, in the recording process.

"EVERYTHING I AM MUSICALLY I OWE TO PETER."
MICK FLEETWOOD

GETTY

That was my job, along with the engineer. He fully understood the basics though. I think he felt that his job was to create the music and the atmosphere that was essential to get the best results. If I had any qualms it would only have been that they could sometimes be infuriating with their persistent 'messing around'.

Mike Ross (engineer): The first time I met Peter was when they walked into our studio, which was on the first floor above a fashion shop. It wasn't a great studio, but we made it work. It had been a ballroom in the early 1900s, so it had very high ceilings which we'd had lowered, otherwise drum sounds would just bounce around everywhere.

As a staff engineer for CBS, I was doing pop bands like The Marmalade and The Tremeloes, so this was my first real exposure to blues.

Peter was obviously the boss, he was very verbal. The two people I remember doing most of the talking were Mick Fleetwood and Peter Green. They were the guys in charge. The others were more quiet, a bit laid back. Mick and Peter used to give me lifts home after sessions because I lived at Holland Park and they were in Shepherd's Bush, and that's how I started to realise what good friends they were. They were very close.

Those sessions were mainly recorded live, with the band DI'd straight into the mixing desk. We were using a four-track recorder, but they wouldn't let us record them separately, which I would have preferred, to achieve a better sound. Peter didn't want a 'better' sound. He wanted it to sound as near as possible to the way they sounded on stage. So they would all play at once, with Peter singing and playing simultaneously. As a result, there was quite a lot of spill across the tracks, which I think did add to the roomy sound. It was absolutely live, but it wasn't dirty enough for them. There were lots of conversations about how Chess Records sounded. They even brought in a couple of Chess 78s to illustrate the sound they wanted.

In fact, when they heard the tapes they were really not happy with them, but there wasn't much we could do about that except maybe re-mix them a little by changing the levels on the tracks. They wanted it to sound rougher, but Mike Vernon was able to talk them out of that, so we didn't really get close to what they wanted until the second album, *Mr Wonderful*, where we got them to bring their stage amps and speakers into the studio and play through them.

December 5, 1967: John Mayall is in recording studios in London working on the tracks *Jenny* and *Picture On The Wall*, with Peter Green on guitar.

Danny Kirwan (second from right) joined the Mac in August 1968.

John Mayall: Even after Peter left, we remained great friends, so I would go out to see him playing live in Fleetwood Mac, which was a very exciting band – mostly my old band – but you can't stand in the way of progress.

December 11, 1967: Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac is in CBS studios recording *My Heart Beat Like A Hammer*, *Shake Your Money Maker* and *Leaving Town Blues*. The first two of these tracks will appear on the band's debut album, *Fleetwood Mac*.

Mike Ross: I was impressed by the quality of their songs, and also by the speed at which they worked. Most of the songs would be just two takes, or even one in some cases.

They took it all quite seriously, no messing around once they got down to work. Mike Vernon was quite a strict producer. I think they knew better than to mess around with him being there.

The only one who was a bit of a humorous character was Jeremy Spencer. He just wanted to be Elvis Presley and he'd come out with a bit of *Heartbreak Hotel* or something in the middle of a session. He wanted tape echo on everything. He was a rock'n'roller at heart, more so than a blues man, but his Elmore James' guitar style was amazing.

Jeremy Spencer: Peter had asked me on the band's onset if I ever wrote my own material and I had told him that I didn't. The problem was that I was uninspired with getting anything new. No wonder he eventually welcomed Danny Kirwan's creative addition.

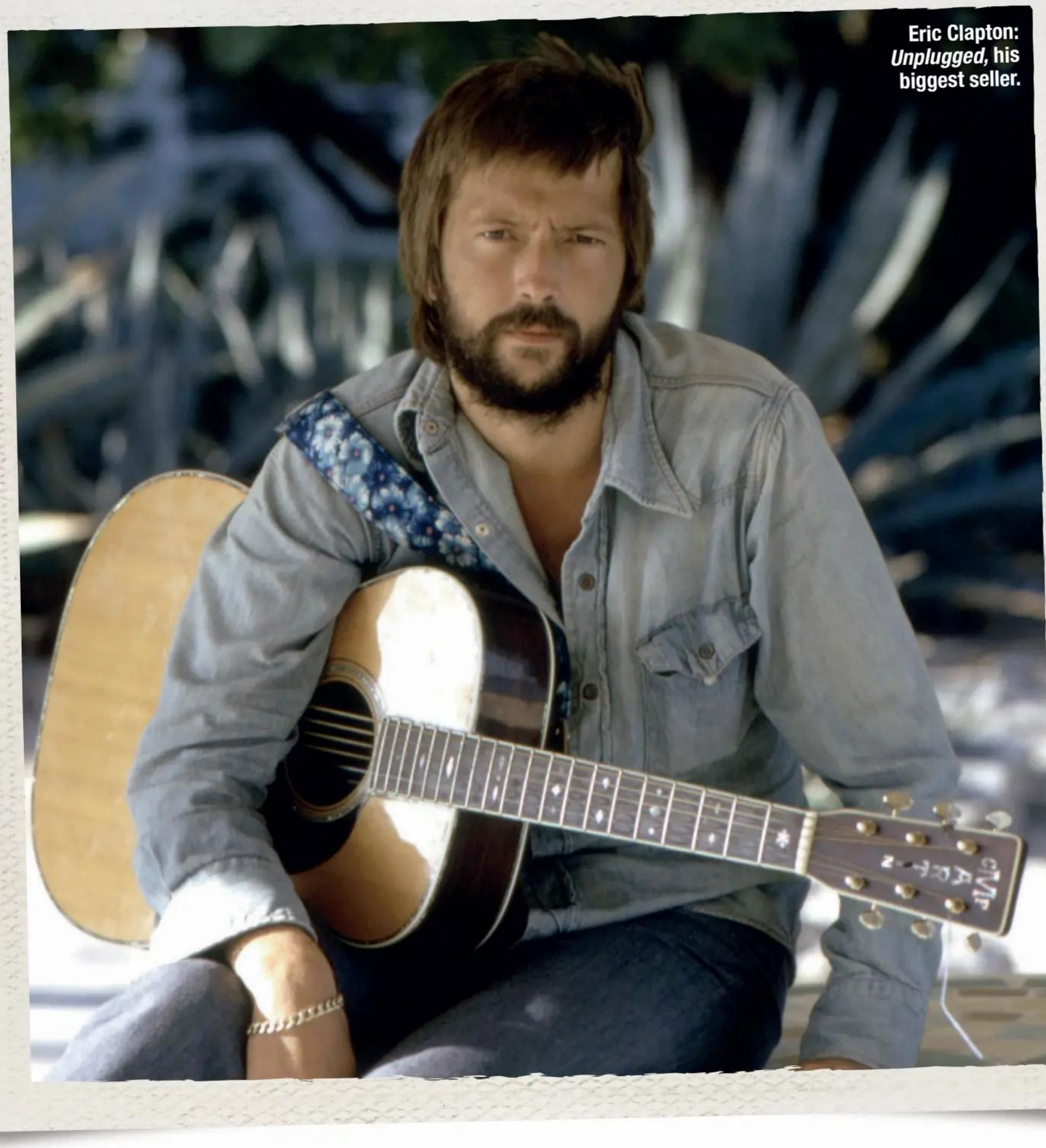
February 16, 1968: Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac release their debut album, *Fleetwood Mac*, on Blue Horizon. It will peak at No4 and remain on the UK chart for 37 weeks.

Mike Vernon: Peter was able to really put good melodies together within his playing, probably more so than Clapton who had a much more rhythmical approach, he never got out of the groove. Whereas Eric had energy in his playing, Peter had a deftness, a touch and a more melodic style, and actually at that time he probably had a deeper blues than Eric.

Melody Maker (review): The is the best English blues LP ever released.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT...

Seeking to expand the band's musical horizons, Green drafted in a third guitarist, Danny Kirwan, and the major hit singles started in 1969 with *Albatross*, *Man Of The World* and *Oh Well*. Green's well-documented and disastrous encounters with LSD resulted in the demise of the first incarnation of Fleetwood Mac, but the remnants relocated to the US where, eventually, with a change of line-up and musical direction, they were reincarnated as one of the most successful rock bands of all time.



Eric Clapton: *Unplugged,* his biggest seller.

Eric Clapton

From purist Yardbird mod to Bluesbreaker God, to shaggy Afro-ed Creamster and *Layla* worshipper, Eric had it all.

ERIC CLAPTON'S 51-year career spans 22 solo albums, 11 live albums, four with Cream, one-offs with John Mayall, Derek And The Dominoes and Blind Faith, and moonlight flits with Aretha Franklin, Buddy Guy and more.

It all started with The Yardbirds, who exploded on to London's R&B scene in 1963. Captured in the heat of the moment on 1964's *Five Live Yardbirds*, the guitarist, born in Ripley, Surrey in 1945, screamed potential as he unleashed fire and skill on what the group called rave-ups – that's experimental instrumental passages inspired by jazz improv. After the band went pop with their third single, 1965's *For Your Love*, Clapton jumped ship to work with John Mayall. Ditching his Fender Telecaster and Vox AC30 for a 1960 Gibson Les Paul and Marshall, his distorted tone on 1966's *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* ignited the British blues boom.

Post-Mayall, he formed Cream with drummer Ginger Baker and bassist Jack Bruce, who reflected the changing times in their lysergic blues from 1967's second album *Disraeli Gears* to 1969's *Goodbye*. Clapton and Baker then worked together in Blind Faith alongside Traffic's Steve Winwood and Family's Ric Grech. Their 1969 self-titled album still divides opinion and even Clapton preferred the supergroup's opening act, Delaney & Bonnie. After a stint playing live and in the studio with the pair, he co-wrote the majority of his first solo record, 1970's *Eric Clapton*, with them which made the Top 20 on both sides of the Atlantic – the same year spawned Derek And The Dominoes' *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs*, his masterwork. In 1974, *461 Ocean Boulevard*, contained his sole number one solo single, Bob Marley's *I Shot The Sheriff*.

Highpoints in Slowhand's subsequent back catalogue include 1992's *Unplugged*, his biggest-selling album to date; 2000's *Riding With The King*, with his hero B.B. King; and 2004's *Me And Mr Johnson*, his heartfelt tribute to Robert Johnson.

ALICE CLARK

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction

DEREK AND THE DOMINOES

Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs

His most personal work.

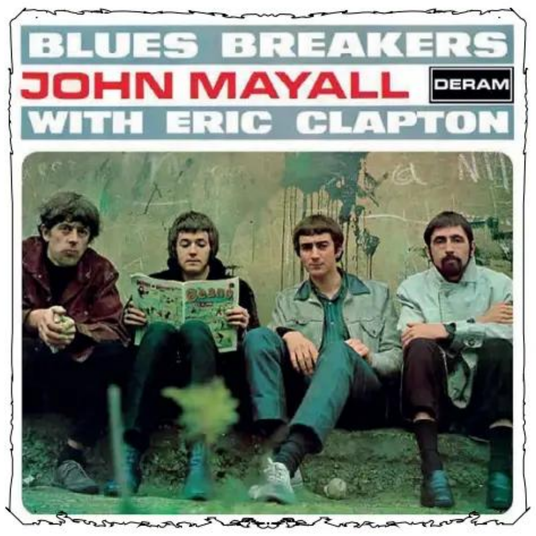
He's signalled every giant step forward from 1963 onwards, so reducing his catalogue down to just one essential album is near impossible. But, when push comes to shove, 1970's *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs*, recorded under the name Derek And The Dominoes at Miami's Criteria studios with producer Tom Dowd, is the one that captures Clapton at his very best. Driven by painful yearning for his friend George Harrison's wife, Patti, Clapton is laid bare, revealing inner workings on a fine balance of candid songwriting and standards he makes his very own.

The group arose from the ashes of Delaney & Bonnie & Friends, when Clapton teamed with co-writer/keyboardist Bobby Whitlock, bassist Carl Radle, drummer Jim Gordon and guitarist Duane Allman, who contributes one of the most remarkable intros ever on the title track. With the addition of Gordon's threnodial piano coda, it's the most stirring piece of music in the Clapton canon to date.

It's also one of the most successful, placing in the UK and US Top 10 when released in 1972 as a single on the back of *The History Of Eric Clapton* compilation. But the album's more than just the record's most famous track. *Tell The Truth*, the first song Clapton and Whitlock penned for the project, modelled on Sam and Dave's churchy call and response, with the pair trading verses, points the direction for every down home blues-rock band since. *Bell Bottom Blues* captures Clapton at his most urgent, with heart on sleeve. And then there are the tear-it-up covers *Key To The Highway, Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out* and *Have You Ever Loved A Woman? The Layla Sessions: 20th Anniversary Edition* from 1990 adds three discs of unissued tracks, alternate takes and studio jams.

DAVID GAHR

SUPERIOR
The releases that built his reputation



JOHN MAYALL WITH ERIC CLAPTON
Blues Breakers

The catalyst for the blues boom and all guitar rock after.

This recording from West Hampstead's Decca Studios, produced by Mike Vernon, captures the verve and excitement of their stage show and highlights Clapton's transition from blues fan to blues-rock pioneer. Future Fleetwood Mac bassist John McVie and drummer Hughie Flint are behind him, at his side is Mayall, as Clapton imprints his personality onto Otis Rush's *All Your Love* and Freddie King's *Hideaway* and on Robert Johnson's *Ramblin' On My Mind*, he gives us his first lead vocal.

THE YARDBIRDS
Five Live Yardbirds

Slowhand's starting point.

The Yardbirds wowed audiences with their feverish live show captured at the Marquee in 1964 on this album, the perfect encapsulation not only of the five piece's on-stage allure but of Clapton's nascent innovation. Displacing the Chicago jukejoint to a sweaty London club, they pin their allegiance to Windy City R&B, tearing through Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Eddie Boyd numbers with a fan-like commitment and determination. Howlin' Wolf's *Smokestack Lightning* provides the highpoint, and the ideal vehicle for their signature rave-up – an extended improv where guitar and blues harp do climactic battle.

CREAM
Disraeli Gears

Clapton blueprints the power trio and breaks America.

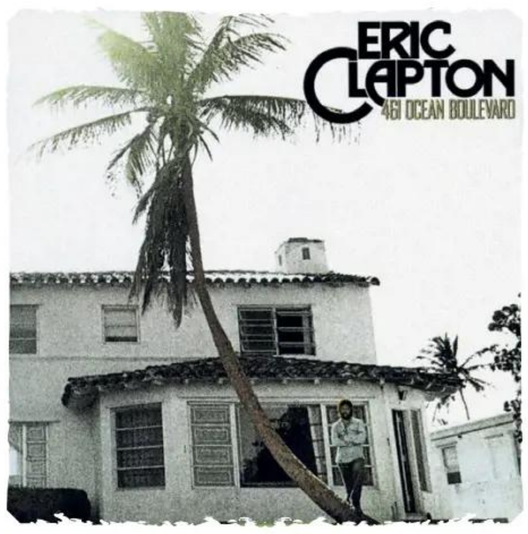
Breaking free of the blues-rock straitjacket and heavily under the influence of Jimi Hendrix, Clapton produces some of his most memorable riffs, see *Sunshine Of Your Love* in particular, one of the album's two singles written by Jack Bruce, Pete Brown – Bruce's beat poet pal – and Clapton. Cream's 1967 second album and follow-up to the previous year's *Fresh Cream* captures a group rooted in the blues but perfectly attuned with the times; *Tales Of Brave Ulysses* sees Clapton embrace the wah-wah pedal; *Strange Brew* is built on an Albert King riff.

GOOD
Worth a butcher's

DELANEY & BONNIE & FRIENDS
On Tour With Eric Clapton

Slowhand does Stax soul.

The husband and wife team's third album, 1970's *On Tour With Eric Clapton*, is just that, the duo on the road backed by a stellar band including Clapton, Bobby Whitlock, Leon Russell and Dave Mason. Capturing Clapton in transitional mindset, post-Blind Faith, pre-solo artist, its eight tracks reveal inner workings that come to fruition on his self-titled debut later that year. Reissued in 2010, expanded to four CDs, the *On Tour* box set includes material culled from 1969 Royal Albert Hall and Croydon Fairfield Halls gigs.

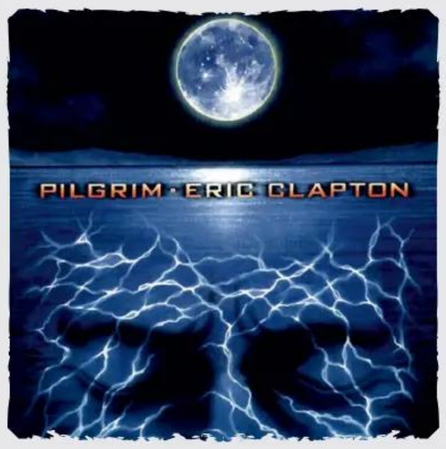


ERIC CLAPTON
461 Ocean Boulevard

At his commercial peak.

After a three-year heroin addiction, Clapton returned with his second solo set in 1974. Recorded in Miami's Criteria Studios with producer Tom Dowd, backing vocalists Yvonne Elliman and George Terry, and main influences JJ Cale and Bob Marley, it balanced blues with pop and reggae on his cover of Marley's *I Shot The Sheriff,* which helped introduce reggae to the international stage. His reworkings of Robert Johnson's *Steady Rollin' Man*, the traditional *Motherless Children* and Elmore James' *I Can't Hold Out* stole the show.

AVOID
Like the plague



ERIC CLAPTON
Pilgrim

Clapton's guitar smothered by over-production.

His first set of original songs since 1989's *Journeyman*, 1998's 13th solo album saw Clapton revealing his heart with songs about the death of his son, Conor, in 1991. Despite his first-rate band including Joe Sample, Andy Fairweather-Low, Pino Palladino et al behind him, Clapton is stripped of his soul (and blues) and his guitar for the most part by producer Simon Climie, whose more-is-more approach smothers everything with polish, synths and drum machine.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

SMOKESTACK LIGHTNING (LIVE)
FIVE LIVE YARDBIRDS

FIVE LONG YEARS (LIVE)
FIVE LIVE YARDBIRDS

ALL YOUR LOVE
BLUESBREAKERS

HIDEAWAY
BLUESBREAKERS

RAMBLIN' ON MY MIND
BLUESBREAKERS

SUNSHINE OF YOUR LOVE
DISRAELI GEARS

TALES OF BRAVE ULYSSES
DISRAELI GEARS

CROSSROADS (LIVE)
WHEELS OF FIRE

BADGE
GOODBYE

CAN'T FIND MY WAY HOME
BLIND FAITH

COMING HOME
ON TOUR WITH ERIC CLAPTON

TELL THE TRUTH
LAYLA AND OTHER ASSORTED LOVE SONGS

LAYLA
LAYLA AND OTHER ASSORTED LOVE SONGS

KEY TO THE HIGHWAY
LAYLA AND OTHER ASSORTED LOVE SONGS

MOTHERLESS CHILDREN
461 OCEAN BOULEVARD

LET IT GROW
461 OCEAN BOULEVARD

COCAINE
SLOWHAND

THREE O'CLOCK BLUES
RIDING WITH THE KING

MAKE IT A DOUBLE

He's one of the most heralded guitarists of his generation, whose admirers include Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray Vaughan. BUDDY GUY looks back on his career and pays tribute to the bluesmen who inspired his own beginnings with a new two-disc album.

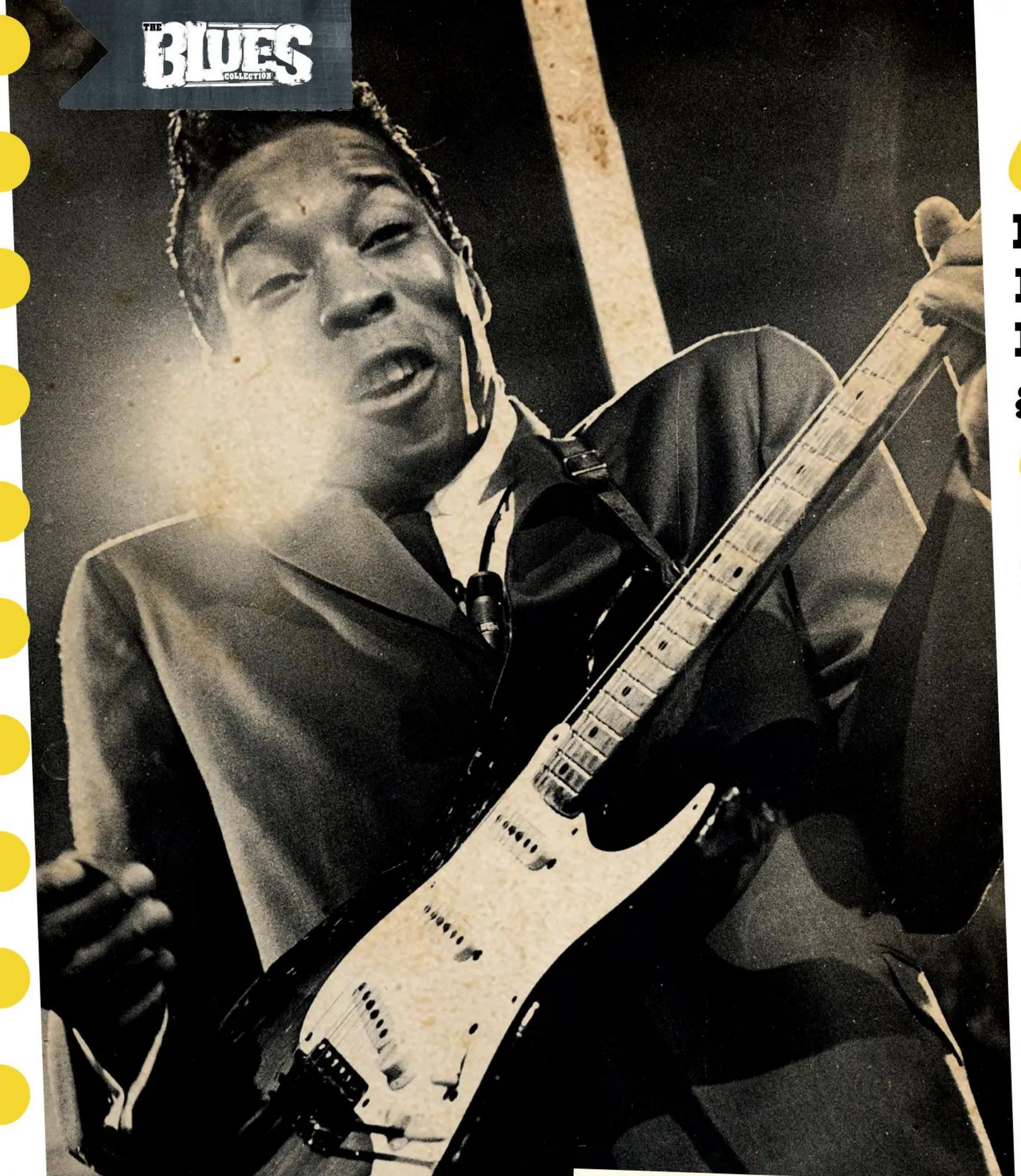
Words: **Alice Clark**

"I blame my producer Tom Hambridge," says Buddy Guy down the phone from Chicago, his home of 56 years. "The album was all his idea." The 77-year-old blues singer/guitarist is talking about *Rhythm & Blues*, his recent double album, featuring 21 tracks, disc one comprising R&B – "music for, like B.B. King said, if you want to boogie-woogie all night long," Guy explains – and disc two, the blues – "you know the slower stuff, to sit down and listen to".

The follow-up to 2010's Grammy Award-winning *Living Proof*, *Rhythm & Blues* was recorded at Nashville's Blackbird Studios in just over two weeks, and it's a fiery record, that lyrically plays out like his autobiography. It also sees Guy reunite with the aforesaid producer and songwriter Hambridge for a third time, and pairs him with a stellar cast of guest musicians ranging from Gary Clark Jr, Kid Rock and Beth Hart to the perhaps more surprising likes of Aerosmith and country singer Keith Urban.

"I got lucky on the duets and, you know, the songs just kept coming and we just kept recording. I'd turn up to the studio at 10 in the morning and we'd finish one song, and they'd be another lined up to record," he chuckles. "I'd say we only need 15 for a CD, but these songs, they sounded so good so Tom Hambridge said, 'Let's make it a double.' We sure do like to work hard when we're enjoying ourselves."

Buddy Guy, born in Lettsworth, Louisiana in 1936, has been working hard and enjoying himself since he moved to Chicago in 1957, aged just 21. He recorded his debut single, 1958's *Sit And Cry (The Blues)* and 1959 follow up *This Is The End* for Chicago label Cobra imprint Artistic Records, before signing to Chess in 1960. That same year, he released the impressive *The First Time I Met The Blues* on the label, but spent much of his seven-year tenure there as a sideman, working with Muddy Waters, Koko Taylor, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter et al. It wasn't until he went to the UK in 1965 that he realised he was making waves in his own right. Jimi Hendrix, Rod Stewart, Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton were all vocal fans, as were The Beatles, who wanted him to



> **I had to come to England, like Hendrix did, to get noticed.**

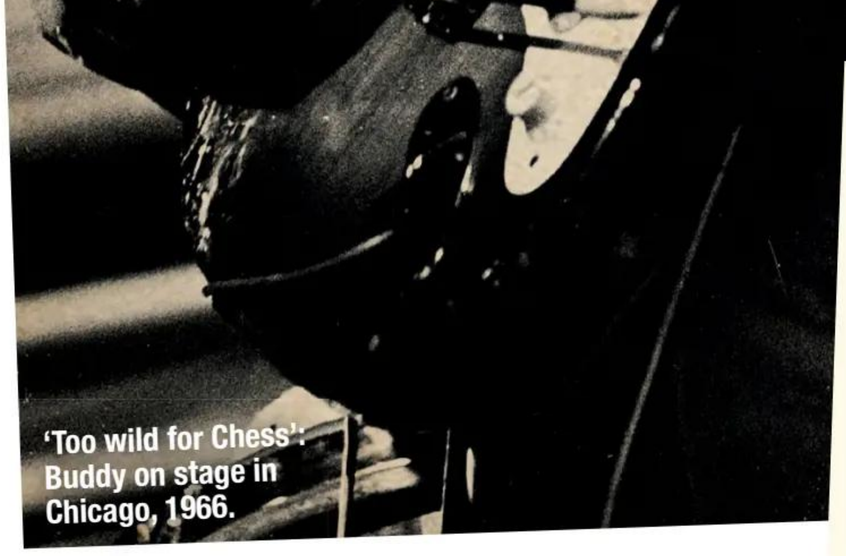
me?' If he didn't sing it, I was ready to hide under the table, but he came back up on stage and he sang a verse of it. It was one of the happiest moments of my life."

This is your third album with producer Tom Hambridge, who also worked on 2008's *Skin Deep* and *Living Proof* with you. How did the pair of you first hook up?

He would come along to my shows, he had his own band, he played drums really well and he'd use my keyboard player, and he could sing too. He reminded me of a young Willie Dixon, he was that good, and I went to my record company and said, 'This is the guy I want to work with.' They weren't sure at first, they said, 'He's never done anything before', and I said, 'Well that's just what they told me when I was 13 and went looking for my first job. They asked me if I had any experience and I said, 'I'm only 13' and they started laughing and I got hired.

You mention a likeness between Tom Hambridge and Willie Dixon. How does recording in the studio today compare to recording in the late 50s and early 60s at Cobra and Chess?

When I first came in as a youngster at Cobra, Willie Dixon, he said, if anything good comes out of this session I'm going to take the credit for it. He'd tell me how to play, what to play, when to play and when not to play. Tom Hambridge, he says, this studio, it belongs to you, here's the material, you do what you want to do, you do it the Buddy Guy way. It's liberating, because being told what to do and how to do it, it held me back for many years. It was only when I came to London in February 1965 and met up with Jeff Beck, Rod Stewart and Eric Clapton that I found out that anyone recognised my playing. I had to come to England, like Hendrix did, to get noticed. My first big record, *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues*, was recorded in London and they told me to be Buddy Guy. That's the same approach Tom Hambridge uses. It's the way it should be.



'Too wild for Chess': Buddy on stage in Chicago, 1966.

record for Apple – the deal fell through when they wouldn't buy him a house.

On leaving Chess in 1967, Guy recorded for Vanguard (including the 1968 ace *A Man And The Blues* album) and continued the fruitful partnership he'd first struck up with harmonica player Junior Wells on Wells' 1965 landmark album *Hoodoo Man Blues*. He continued to record and play live to a dedicated fanbase for the next two decades, opened Legends, his blues club in Chicago in 1989, joined Clapton on stage at London's Royal Albert Hall in 1991 and securing a deal with Silvertone on the back of it, broke through with that year's *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues*. Featuring Clapton, the album yielded his first gold album and Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Blues Album – he now has six, plus a phenomenal 28 Blues Music Awards. In 2005, he was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, and last year sung *Sweet Home Chicago* at the White House alongside US President Barack Obama.

"I'd heard him do Al Green at Harlem's Apollo Theatre and I just thought, well, he's from Chicago, it's worth asking. So he did this speech and after I just said, 'Wait a minute Mr President, how about singing *Sweet Home Chicago* with

How did you approach the songwriting on this new album?

Tom carries a notepad and pencil with him. We'll be on the tour bus, in a restaurant, just sitting somewhere and we'll be talking and he'll ask me about my early life and a lot of the songs on the album, they came from those

GETTY X2

conversations. He'd say, 'You don't know it, but you're writing songs while you're talking to me.' I was like, 'You're kidding me.'

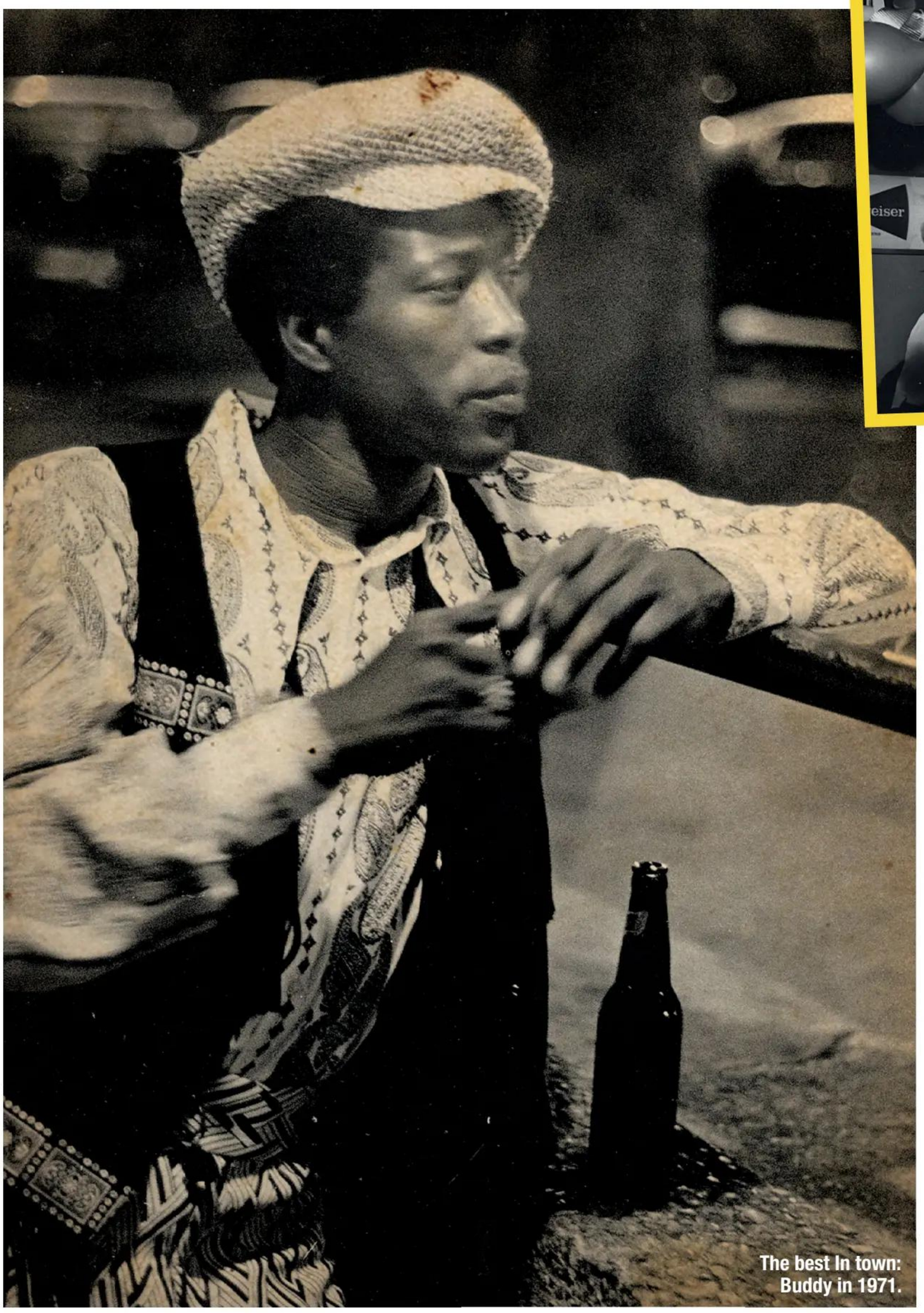
So did songs like *I Came Up Hard* and *My Mama Loved Me*, which relate tales of your early days growing up in Lettsworth, Louisiana, come from such conversations?
They sure did. See, I was born on a farm, we lived in a wooden shack and I didn't see no running water until I was 17, we had to pump it. We had no electricity to start out with, and we worked from sun up to sun down and we didn't have a radio so I didn't get to hear music. We had a guitar player come out called Coot each Christmas, he'd play songs on his two string guitar, and I was desperate to hear music so I would make it on anything I could. I made my first guitar when I was seven, it wasn't a proper guitar, I put three nails in a lighter fluid can and stretched some wire tight enough so I could hear it when I twanged it, then I started using rubber bands and I'd also bang on a tin can. I'd make music with what I could find. I'd tell Tom these stories. He'd write them down and turn them into a song.

You're always going to be associated with the Windy City. On the album opener, *Best In Town*, you sing, *'When I first heard Muddy Waters/ I knew I was Chicago bound/ Started playing on the South Side/ And this is what I found.'*
The first song I learnt to play was *Boogie Chillen* by John Lee Hooker. I was 13 and we got our first electricity and a phonograph record player and I played along to Jimmy Reed and Muddy Waters. Then I got to Chicago and suddenly Muddy was asking me to come into the studio and play on his records. I was like, 'Are you kidding me?' It was like going to school, being in the studio with Howlin' Wolf singing *300 Pounds Of Joy* and me playing a little rhythm lick behind him. But the title, *Best In Town*, that was inspired by something my parents used to say to me. They'd say, 'Don't be the best in town, just be the best until the best come around.' I was working at the Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and I knew a guy who'd been living in Chicago. He told me you'd got Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Little Walter all recording and playing live there. He said to come to Chicago, to work in the university because I could make more money in the north. My mother, she had just had a stroke, I wanted to help her, so I moved there because I knew I'd be able to send her more money. It wasn't because I thought I'd be a guitar player. That just happened when I got there.

> **I didn't see no running water until I was 17.**

Chicago is an obvious lyrical inspiration on the album and you open the Blues side with the track *Meet Me In Chicago*, which was written by sacred steel and slide guitarist Robert Randolph. You first teamed up with him on the *Skin Deep* album, didn't you?
Yes, he's a real talent. He made a demo on the song and I heard it and I said, 'Man, I love this song.' It's actually my favourite on the album and it feels like a real homecoming when I sing it.

You do a cover of Guitar Slim's *Well I Done Got Over It* on the record. How important is Guitar Slim in the Buddy Guy story?
He is very important. He was the first guy I ever saw play a Strat guitar and, boy, could he play. I saw him in Baton Rouge at the Masonic Temple. I moved to Baton Rouge when I was 15 and seeing Slim, it sure changed my life. I heard *The Things That I Used To Do*, it was arranged and produced by Ray Charles, and I played that song over and over again. Then live, his show was amazing, he was playing his guitar over his head and behind his back, he was running around the stage and jumping on his amplifiers, he was wearing all red, had red shoes and dyed red hair and I thought, that's what I'm going to do myself. And that's what I did, but that style, it was too wild for Chess Records. They didn't want me turning the amplifiers up in the studio and creating all that feedback. A year before Leonard Chess died, he called me in and he told me to kick him in his behind because he had seen Hendrix doing just what I had done at Chess and making it big. Leonard said, 'You had this all the time and we were too dumb to realise it.' But I understood, they had Muddy Waters, they had Howlin' Wolf, they had Little Walter, they weren't ready for me. I came to Chicago on September 5, 1957 and Guitar Slim, he passed



The best In town: Buddy in 1971.

“I’d like to see 10 or 20 Gary Clark Jr’s out there.”

the following year but he was a mentor to me and that’s why I did this song. Hopefully people who’ve never heard him or this song will go back and hear his original. It’s all about keeping the blues tradition alive.

Was it the same reasoning behind your cover of Willie Mabon’s *Poison Ivy*, which closes the record?
Yes, mam, so the world gets turned back onto him too.

Tell me about working with Gary Clark Jr on the track *Blues Don’t Care*. How did you first discover him?
I discovered Gary Clark Jr through Eric Clapton. He had him playing on a show and I was knocked out by him. I thought, we’ve got this youngster giving blues a lift, keeping it alive, like the British guys – the Claptons, the Becks, these really great guitar players keeping it going – and I saw the similarities straight off with me, the young guitar player, pushing the limits, but when I was coming up, we had the great T-Bone Walker, the Muddys, the Wolfs, I wasn’t on my own. Gary’s out there on his own, holding the blues flame. I’d like to see 10 or 20 Gary Clark Jrs out there.

You also work with Beth Hart, another blues artist continuing the tradition, on *What You Gonna Do About Me*. How did that come about?
Now that’s one of my favourites on the album. She gave me the lift I needed. She sure can sing and play, can’t she? I heard her singing at the Kennedy Awards at the White House [Guy was there to receive the 2012 Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime contribution to American culture], she’d been singing with Jeff Beck. I didn’t do *What You Gonna Do About Me* in the studio with her though. I did the song and my producer says, ‘I want to see if I can get Beth’, and I say, ‘If you can get her, that will give me the lift I need’, and she did the most incredible job on that song. I want to bring her out when we go out live.

The Muscle Shoals horns are playing on it too.
They were dubbed on after. We’d do the song, then I’d hear the playback and I’d be like, ‘we need that here’, ‘we need that there’. I just knew they’d fit perfectly. We got them in on *Best In Town*, *What’s Up With That Woman* and *All That Makes Me Happy Is The Blues* too.

What sparked the idea to do a cover of Junior Wells’ *Messin’ With The Kid* with Kid Rock?
I saw Kid Rock at the Kennedy Awards too and I was thinking how *Messin’ With The Kid*, that’s the perfect fit for him. I said to him, ‘I’d like to do *Messin’ With The Kid* with you.’ He said, ‘You just tell me where and when and I’ll be there.’ He did real good on that one.

It must have brought back memories of working with your friend and longtime partner Junior Wells, who did the original in 1960.
It sure did, and great ones, too. I first saw him at the 708 club, that would have been in the 50s and he played in Muddy’s band and we just jammed and it went from there. He is very much missed.

***All That Makes Me Happy Is The Blues* sounds like your manifesto song. Is that what motivates you to keep on pushing forward?**
I worry about the legacy of Muddy, Wolf, Little Walter, all the guys who created this stuff, who inspired me to go and play the blues. I want people to remember them. It’s like the Ford car – Henry Ford invented the Ford car, and regardless how much technology they got on them now, you still have that little sign that says ‘Ford’ on the front. Less than a month before Muddy died, I found out he was ill and I said, ‘I’m coming on up to see you’, and he said, ‘Don’t come and see me, just keep the blues alive’, and that’s what I’ve been doing and I’ll continue to keep doing. I don’t know what else to do but keep on playing.

Rhythm & Blues is out now on RCA.

GETTY x2

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE GREATEST ALBUMS EVER MADE

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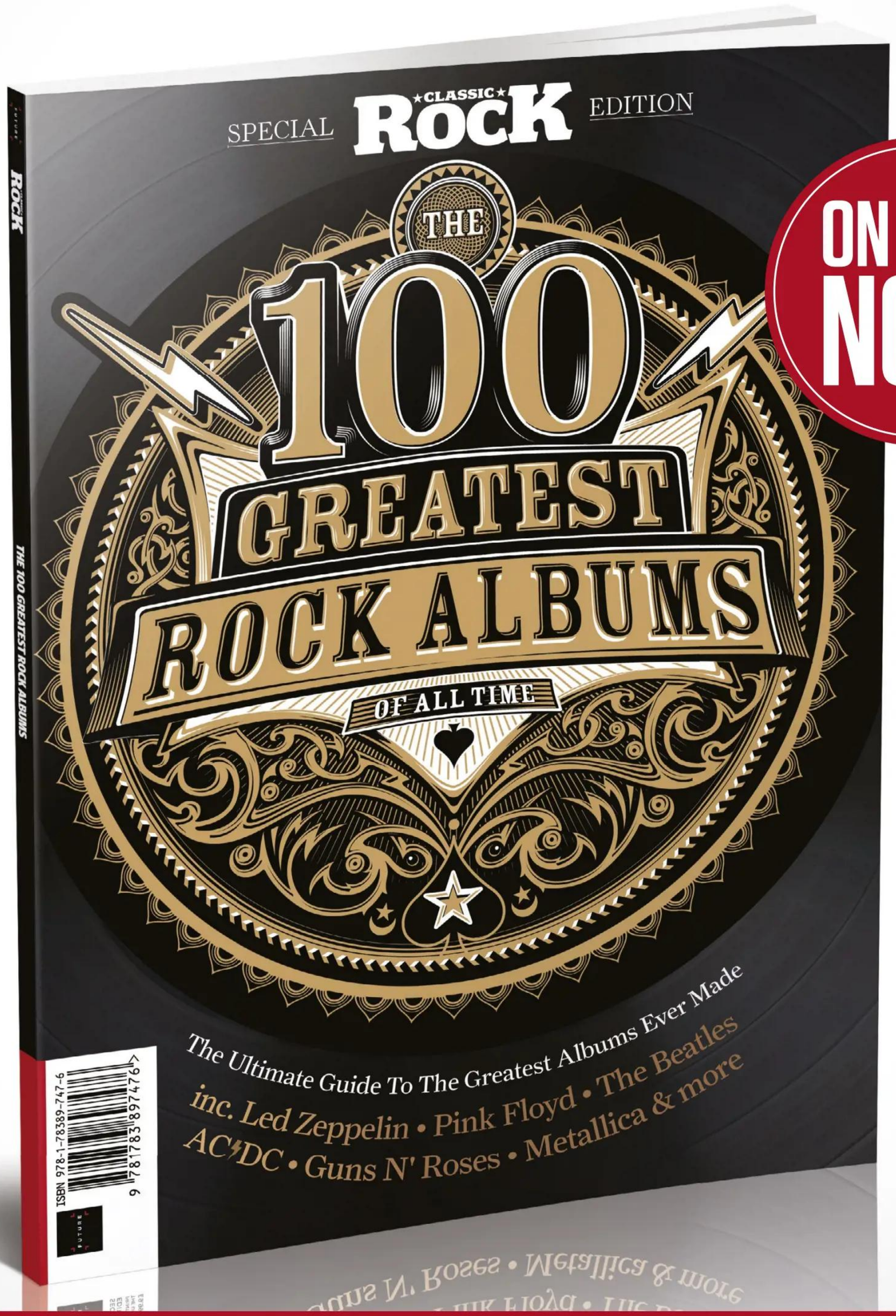

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Soul of a woman: Aretha Franklin.

Aretha Franklin

From gospel soloist to the queen of soul, Aretha Franklin became the face of "blues with a feeling".

Ray Charles might have been the first to secularise gospel music and signal the direction towards what we call soul, but Aretha came to define the genre. "Genius is the word," said Atlantic producer Jerry Wexler when describing her. And he was bang on the money.

During her tenure at the Atlantic label from 1967 to 1979, she never put a foot wrong, her 16 albums for the label spanning *I Never Loved A Man The Way I Love You* to *La Diva*, are the perfect mix of gospel intensity and effusive honesty. They are "blues with a feeling".

The daughter of Reverend CL Franklin, Aretha had honed her craft in her Detroit home, at her father's New Bethel Baptist Church singing alongside her sisters Carolyn and Erma, and on the road sharing bills with Clara Ward and the Ward Singers and family friend Sam Cooke And The Soul Stirrers – it was Cooke who inspired her to go secular.

Her 1956 spirited debut, *Never Grow Old*, recorded when she was just 14, and follow-up 1959's *Precious Lord*, both released on the local JVB label, drew on her sanctified roots; at Columbia from 1961, under the guidance of producer John Hammond, she was modelled on his previous discovery Billie Holiday. She sang jazz standards and torch songs and recorded a tribute to Dinah Washington which only narrowly missed inclusion in our guide (*Unforgettable: A Tribute to Dinah Washington*). She also sang pop and occasionally R&B and it was the latter that struck a chord – the fired up *Rough Lover* and *Tighten Up Your Tie, Button Up Your Jacket*, hinting at what Aretha could do in the right hands. The right hands being Jerry Wexler's, who told her, "just be yourself". She sat in front of the piano in Rick Hall's Fame Studios in Alabama, with the Muscle Shoals rhythm section behind her, and did just that. The result: *I Never Loved A Man The Way I Love You* yielded her first US R&B Number 1 single. Aretha had arrived.

ALICE CLARK

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction

I NEVER LOVED A MAN THE WAY I LOVE YOU

Atlantic

The quintessential soul music album.

On signing to Atlantic in 1967, label owner and producer Jerry Wexler teamed Aretha with the Muscle Shoals rhythm section – Spooner Oldham (organ), Chips Moman (rhythm guitar), Roger Hawkins (drums), Tommy Cogbill (bass), Jimmy Johnson (guitar) – at Rick Hall's Fame Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

The Wexler, Hall and rhythm section triumvirate had already struck gold with Wilson Pickett's *Land Of 1000 Dances* and *Mustang Sally*, and were set to fare even better with Aretha. But sessions came to an abrupt halt after a heated falling out between Hall and Aretha's then husband/manager Ted White. Only two tracks were completed – the Ronnie Shannon-penned, gospel-infused title track plus *Do Right Woman, Do Right Man*, an effusive number written by Moman and Dan Penn – before the singer returned to New York and, a month later with band in tow, finished the record in Atlantic's studio.

Despite the disruption, the record turned out to be extraordinary. Aretha's impassioned vocal delivery and gospel infused piano playing pinned to the 'greasy' rhythms of the Atlantic engine room resulted in some of the most breathtaking soul music ever made. That astonishing title track, put down in just two hours, scored Aretha her inaugural US R&B Number 1 hit and Top 10 pop placing. Her fervid makeover of Otis Redding's *Respect*, in her hands an exhilarating feminist rallying cry, returned her to the top of the R&B chart and landed her her first US pop number 1.

The album was a commercial success too, giving Aretha her first US R&B number 1 long player and highest US album pop chart placing when it peaked at number 2.

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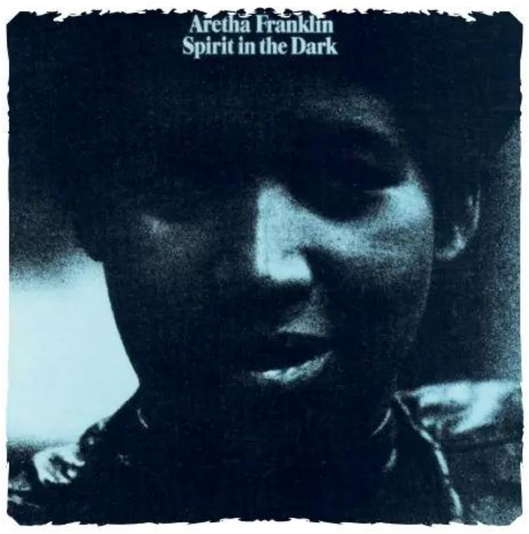
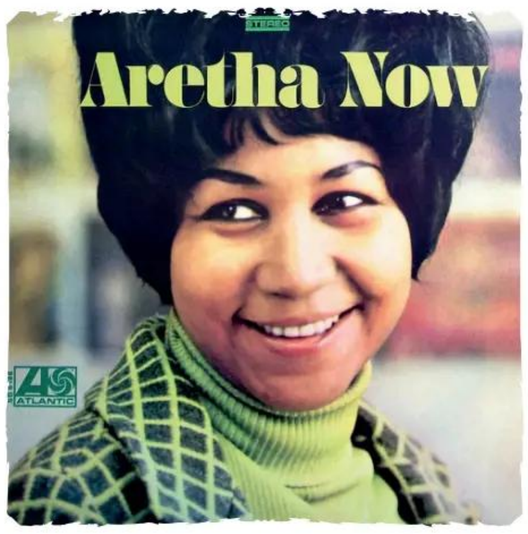
SUPERIOR
The releases that built her reputation



SPIRIT IN THE DARK
Atlantic

A creative coming of age.

Having divorced Ted White, her husband of seven years, in 1970 a liberated Aretha seizes control of her craft, writing five of her seventh Atlantic album's 12 cuts and playing piano on ten. The title track, an exuberant call and response spiritual, sets out her stall: Aretha is triumphant, jubilant, enjoying her new found freedom. *Pullin'* builds on that; it's spirited, determined and a real rafter raiser. Even covers of Ben E King's *Don't Play That Song* and B.B. King's *The Thrill Is* Gone – "free, free, free from your spell," she intones on the latter – suggest renewal and restoration.



ARETHA NOW
Atlantic

Aretha brilliantly redefines soul music's classic songbook.

Aretha writes just one song on her 1968 fourth Atlantic LP but *Think*, co-scribed with her then husband Ted, turned out to be one of her most important, both commercially – when released as an album pretaster, it landed her her sixth million-seller and US R&B number 1 – and politically – a vociferous proclamation with its simple but incredibly effective cries for "freedom". Written on the day Dr Martin Luther King Jr was murdered, its significance is huge. The rest of the album is powerful, too, with Aretha stamping her authority on Don Covay, Sam & Dave and Sam Cooke songs.

LADY SOUL
Atlantic

Proof that *I Never Loved A Man* was no one-off.

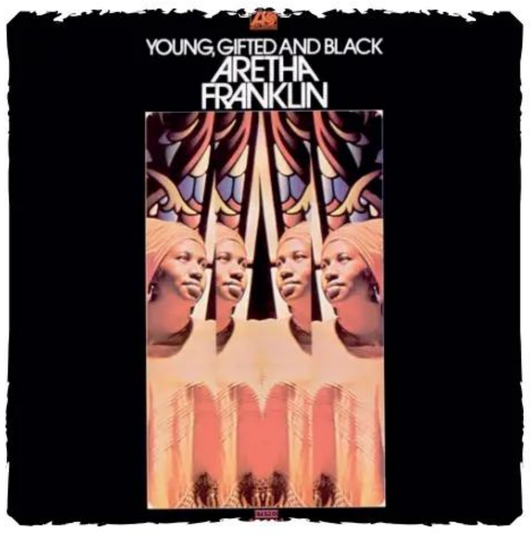
This yielded Aretha her third of five consecutive US R&B number 1s, her second US pop number 2, and her second gold album. It's not surprising – her delivery is sheer perfection, a delicate balance of emotion and restraint from start to finish. An intense, intimate reading of *(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman* trumps any later versions; and an effusive take on *Chain Of Fools* brings the house down. The Sweet Inspirations give the vocal performances of their lives, while Eric Clapton provides the guitar obbligato on *Good To Me As I Am To You*, co-written with Aretha.

GOOD
Worth a butcher's

THE ELECTRIFYING ARETHA FRANKLIN
Columbia

Who said Aretha didn't make any great albums for Columbia?

Each one of Aretha's Columbia albums contain noteworthy tracks, but this, her 1962 second album, is the most complete and glimpses her future. Produced by John Hammond, arranged by Richard Wess and recorded in New York, it captures Aretha's versatility, from the raw, impassioned roadhouse blues of *Rough Lover* to the sophisticated jazz swing of *Rock-A-Bye Your Baby With A Dixie Melody*. The latter rewarded Aretha with her debut Top 40 pop hit.



YOUNG GIFTED AND BLACK
Atlantic

Aretha preaches black consciousness and pride.

Aretha aligns herself to the 'black is beautiful' movement in 1972 with her most political album: the title track, a cover of Nina Simone's civil rights anthem, becomes a joyous hymnal. On *Rock Steady*, a US Number 9 pop hit, she gets funky with Dr John, the Memphis Horns and Bernard Purdie; *Day Dreaming*, a sensual, sun-kissed ode, features flautist Hubert Laws; her sisters Erma and Carolyn cloak The Beatles' *The Long And Winding Road* in delicious gospel harmonies.

AVOID
Like the plague

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU SWEAT
Arista

Dismal outing from 1991 strips Aretha of her soul.

An ill-advised cover of Sly And The Family Stone's *Everyday People*, soporific duets with Michael McDonald and Luther Vandross, slick production from Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Sager, Aretha's eighth studio effort for Arista has few redeeming features. Unbelievably it hit the US Top 30, which says more about the dire state of 90s R&B and soul than it does about the strength of this album.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

ROUGH LOVER
THE ELECTRIFYING ARETHA FRANKLIN

OPERATION HEARTBREAK
B-SIDE

TIGHTEN UP YOUR TIE, BUTTON UP YOUR JACKET
TAKE IT LIKE YOU GIVE IT

I NEVER LOVED A MAN THE WAY I LOVE YOU
I NEVER LOVED A MAN THE WAY I LOVE YOU

RESPECT
I NEVER LOVED A MAN THE WAY I LOVE YOU

SAVE ME
I NEVER LOVED A MAN THE WAY I LOVE YOU

DO RIGHT WOMAN, DO RIGHT MAN
I NEVER LOVED A MAN THE WAY I LOVE YOU

BABY I LOVE YOU
ARETHA ARRIVES

CHAIN OF FOOLS
LADY SOUL

(YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE) A NATURAL WOMAN
LADY SOUL

THINK
ARETHA NOW

I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER
ARETHA NOW

THE WEIGHT
THIS GIRL'S IN LOVE WITH YOU

PULLIN'
SPIRIT IN THE DARK

ROCK STEADY
YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK

YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK
YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK

DAY DREAMING
YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK

GETTY

CAN YOU SEE ME?

Hendrix's debut album, *Are You Experienced*, was pieced together in London in between dazzling live gigs that left the competition reeling. But the end results are still a revelation.

Words: **Johnny Black**

Revered music writer Dave Marsh spoke for many when he called *Are You Experienced*, "The greatest, most influential debut album ever released" but, truth to tell, it was never really conceived as an album at all.

Released on May 12, 1967, *Are You Experienced* ushered in a new and exciting era where albums, not 45s, dominated rock music. Just three weeks after its release, The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* confirmed the album's position. It had now become the definitive statement of a rock artist's worth.

However, when Hendrix went into London's De Lane Lea studios with producer Chas Chandler in October 1966, hit singles were still very much the goal, and the album, which would change it all, would eventually come together via a sequence of higgledy-piggledy recording sessions, strung out between live commitments.

The influences that Hendrix melded together to create the revelatory guitar and songwriting style on the album are many and include his early exposure to the blues, his years on the road as a guitar slinger for hire with Little Richard, the Isley Brothers et al and his fascination with Bob Dylan.

One song, however, would bring all those strands together, spark the →

← world's love affair with Hendrix and establish the template for his earth-shattering debut album.

In the summer of 1966, when Hendrix was between jobs and low on cash, he could be found contemplating his options over a coffee at the Cock'n'Bull café on MacDougal Street in New York's Greenwich Village.

He would stroll over to the café's jukebox again and again and select *Hey Joe* by folkie Tim Rose. Copyrighted in 1962 by songwriter Billy Roberts, it was already one of the most recorded songs of the mid 60s, but whereas most bands treated it as an uptempo rock cut, Rose had slowed it down and introduced a distinctive walking bass line.

About a month later, Chas Chandler, bassist of The Animals, caught Hendrix's set at Café Wha? in the Village, and heard him perform his version of *Hey Joe*. By happy coincidence, The Animals' career was winding down and Chandler was looking to move into management and record production. He saw his golden opportunity in Hendrix, signed him up and flew him to London to launch a new career.

But no one could predict the tumult that would follow Hendrix's arrival in the UK on September 24, 1966. After touchdown at Heathrow, he got straight to it, jamming at the Scotch Of St James club. Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp, The Who's managers were in the audience and so impressed stumped up a £1,000 advance to tie Hendrix to their fledgling record company, Track Records.

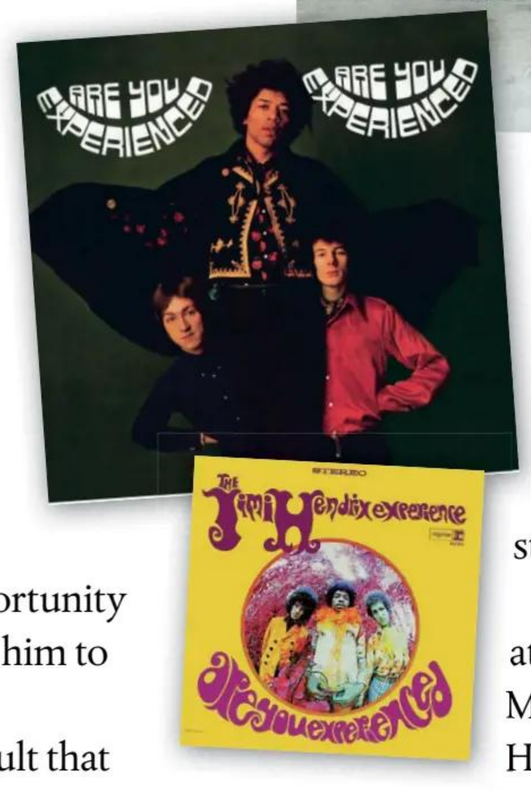
Soon he was also jamming with London based band The VIPS and Eric Burdon and The New Animals. "He just grabbed hold of Vic Briggs' guitar and said, 'Do you mind if I have a jam?'," remembers Eric Burdon, The Animals' singer. "Barry Jenkins and Danny McCulloch from my band just leapt in and chased him on this incredible jam, and the sounds just rocketed around the room, like, ricocheted around the room. I was totally stunned."

Before the month was out, he was performing with keyboard virtuoso Brian Auger at Blaises' club, when guitarist Andy Summers, later of The Police, then in Zoot Money's Big Roll Band walked in. "He had a white Strat and as I walked in he had it in his mouth," recalls Summers. "It was intense and it was really great. It kind of turned all the guitarists in London upside down at the time."

Then on October 1, Chandler arranged for Jimi to jam with Cream at the Polytechnic of Central London. "He did *Killing Floor*, a Howlin' Wolf number I've always wanted to play, but which I've never really had the complete technique to do," admitted guitarist Eric Clapton. "Ginger didn't like it and Jack didn't like it. They'd never heard the song before. It was just, well, he just stole the show."

GETTY

Contractual obligations: (*l-r*) Mitch Mitchell, Jimi Hendrix, Noel Redding and manager Chas Chandler at a 1967 German press conference.



By this time, Noel Redding, attracted by a small ad in Melody Maker, had also jammed with Hendrix on a handful of instrumentals and found himself hired as bassist for the newly named Jimi Hendrix Experience. The arrival of drummer Mitch Mitchell came next. On October 1, he was fired by R&B hitmaker Georgie Fame and five days later he auditioned for Hendrix. They meshed well but at the end, Hendrix simply said, "Okay. I'll see you around." Before Mitchell could leave, though, Chas Chandler mentioned a potential gig in the middle of the month, supporting French pop idol Johnny Hallyday in Paris. Mitchell recalled: "I said 'Okay' and spent three days rehearsing. Then off we went and that was how it started."

On October 23, they entered De Lane Lea with their newly acquired Marshall amplification rigs, to record *Hey Joe*. Chandler had recorded there often with The Animals, but Hendrix was unimpressed. He fought with Chandler about the difficulty of recording at the high volumes essential to the creation of his guitar sound. "This is useless," he fumed, "I'll never be able to make a record here."

Sensing that his control over his protégé could disappear before the sessions were under way, Chandler thought fast. "I'd just come from the Visa Office and I had his passport and a return ticket to America in my pocket. So I handed them to him and said, 'Go on then. Fuck off back to America.' And he just burst out laughing."

'Engineer Mike Ross was horrified to see four huge Marshall cabinets.'

With Chandler's authority established, the session went ahead, but Mitch Mitchell immediately noticed that, "Hendrix was also shy about his voice. He didn't want to be a singer. Chas really had to drag it out of him."

On one take of *Hey Joe*, Hendrix is clearly dismayed. "Hey, make the voice a little lower and the band a little louder," he says.

By the end of the day, after what Redding remembers as almost 30 takes demanded by Chandler, the instrumental tracks were deemed satisfactory, but Jimi's vocal was still missing and there were problems getting the performance from female vocal backing trio The Breakaways.

Several sessions were required over the next few days in whatever studios Chandler could afford. "I couldn't even think of recording a B-side until I had more cash," Chandler revealed later. "I told him, 'There's nothing going on the B-side, but one of your own songs' because I had used up all my money doing *Hey Joe*."

Hendrix rose to the challenge, writing *Hey Joe*'s B-side, *Stone Free*, at his London apartment the next evening and, by the time they could afford to return to De Lane Lea on November 2, he had also delivered *Can You See Me*, which would end up on the album. With its pile-driving riffs, sudden stops and Mitchell's speedy drum fills, Hendrix was clearly finding his feet as a writer.

The next track to be completed was *Love Or* →

Cover stars: (*l-r*): Mitch Mitchell, Jimi Hendrix and Noel Redding.

← right to stand next to the fire. That's how he got the idea."

Even as *Hey Joe* ascended the UK singles chart, on January 10, 1967, he wrote the lyric of *The Wind Cries Mary* immediately after a fight with his English girlfriend Kathy Etchingham who revealed, "All the incidents in it were what happened: I smashed plates on the floor, he swept them up."

The following day they were back in De Lane Lea, working on *Purple Haze*, *51st Anniversary* and a demo of *The Wind Cries Mary*. According to Mitch Mitchell, "Hendrix came in, hummed us the (*Purple Haze*) riff and showed Noel the chord changes. I listened and went 'OK, let's do it.' We got it on the third take."

When *Hey Joe* hit Number 11 on January 16, Chandler had the leverage he needed to wring more cash out of Polydor Records (who were funding Lambert and Stamp's Track imprint) and he moved Hendrix into Olympic Studios.

Purple Haze was completed during their first Olympic session with engineer Eddie Kramer, who would become their long-time collaborator, on February 3. Hendrix replaced his original vocal and enhanced the sound of his lead guitar with the newly invented Octavia effects unit, which fattened up every guitar note with a harmonising note one octave higher.

Regrettably, a clash of commitments meant that Olympic was not always free when Chandler wanted it, so the recording of *I Don't Live Today*, and a demo of the R&B flavoured *Remember* found them back at De Lane Lea in late February. *I Don't Live Today* is particularly memorable for its native American drum pattern and quadruple-layered guitar parts; two with wah-wah, one with distortion, and another with a sitar effect.

The middle of March brought the official launch party for Track Records at London's hip Speakeasy club, and was immediately followed by the UK release of *Purple Haze* and the signing of an American record deal with Reprise Records.

With *Purple Haze* bulleting up the charts, they returned to De Lane Lea on March 29, largely to focus on completing *Remember* and record *Manic Depression*. Chandler deemed the take of *Remember* "much too raggedy", but *Manic Depression*, written in response to a jibe from Chandler who described him as sounding like a manic depressive, was clearly a winner and became the album's opening cut.

With two hit singles to their name, it was now imperative that the album be completed, so on April 3, during a brief gap in touring commitments, they recorded Hendrix's ethereal tribute to his deceased mother, *May This Be Love*, and the breathtaking title track with its backwards guitars.

"It was really Chas and Jimi's working together that made everything so tight," believes Eddie Kramer. "On the first album Jimi worked within a three to four minute song structure. That was Chas's background, and Jimi had to compact his awesome imagination into that tight, polished format. It was very good for him."

Are You Experienced was released in the UK by Track Records and peaked at Number 2, held off the top only by *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

By the time Reprise unveiled *Are You Experienced* to the American public on August 23, Hendrix had three UK hit singles under his belt. So *Red House*, *Can You See Me* and *Remember* were all removed to make way for *Hey Joe*, *Purple Haze* and *The Wind Cries Mary*. In this format, it reached Number 5, and went quadruple platinum.

Acclaim for the album has never faltered, with the US Library Of Congress selecting it in 2005 for permanent preservation in the National Recording Registry at the Library Of Congress in the United States.

So was Dave Marsh right to call it the greatest, most influential debut album released? That's a matter of opinion, but another of Marsh's assertions, that it was "the musical equivalent of the Big Bang," still rings true for millions of rock music devotees worldwide.

"John Lennon produced this portable tape player and proceeded to play Hey Joe."

Mike Nesmith

Give us a swirl: Jimi Hendrix Experience, London, 1967.

GETTY

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FUTURE

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Albert King: Stax superstar.

Stax Records

From Albert King's blues to Otis Redding's sweet soul and Isaac Hayes' throbbing funk… the best of Stax.

WHEN DR MARTIN Luther King Jr made his fateful last visit to Memphis in April '68, the city was a powder keg of racial tension. Yet, over at the old Capitol movie theatre at 926 East McLemore Avenue in South Memphis, Mr King's dream of blacks and whites co-existing in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual respect had been the norm since the early 60s.

By the middle of the decade, Stax was running at full tilt, pumping out killer soul, blues and R&B at a staggering rate. Yet with artists like Otis Redding, Carla Thomas, Eddie Floyd and The Staple Singers – backed in almost all cases by the greatest instrumental group ever, Booker T. & The M.G.s – the quality remained undiminished, and for a few years it was America's greatest soul label. The Beatles considered Stax hallowed ground. They planned to cut an album there until the idea was nixed over security fears.

It was in this celebrated space that Albert King was inspired to create *Born Under A Bad Sign*, an album that would then inspire Eric Clapton, Gary Moore, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Paul Kossoff of Free and just about anyone else who made it their business to play electric blues.

In the aftermath of Dr King's assassination at The Lorraine Motel (an integrated place where black and white Stax artists would hang out, drink and write songs) on April 4, 1968, the harmonious atmosphere at Stax was fractured beyond repair. The studio and label were still producing great sides – that went on into the 70s – but the heart had gone out of the operation. The talent began to drift away and that atmosphere of comradeship and respect began to sour.

It's a tragic but fascinating tale and the behind-the-scenes machinations at Stax are almost as absorbing as the music it produced. Those searching for a deeper account of the label are directed toward two excellent books: Robert Gordon's *Respect Yourself: Stax Records And The Soul Explosion* and *Soulsville, USA: The Story Of Stax Records* by Rob Bowman.

ED MITCHELL

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction

STAX: 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The perfect one-stop shop for any Stax virgins.

While completists with a throbbing love of Southern soul might decide to throw caution – and savings – to the wind and drop substantial coin on the trio of *Complete Stax/Volt Soul Singles* box sets, those of you just looking to add the most iconic Stax sides to your collection should find this two-disc, 50-track collection will scratch that itch. For less than 20 quid, you'll bag the essential 45s that first etched the label on the public's consciousness – *Gee Whiz (Look At His Eyes)* by Carla Thomas, *Last Night* by The Mar-Kays, and Booker T. & The M.G.s' mod pulse-quickener *Green Onions* – and a stream of classics that never fail to amaze with the sheer quality control in their writing and performance.

This is the label that shipped such priceless nuggets as Otis Redding's pounding original version of *Respect* and the posthumously released *(Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay*, Eddie Floyd's *Knock On Wood*, *I'll Take You There* by The Staple Singers, and William Bell's achingly beautiful *You Don't Miss Your Water*. Not to mention Sam & Dave's *Hold On, I'm Comin'*, one of the greatest-sounding 45s of all time. They're all here, nestled alongside stone grooves aplenty, like Linda Lyndell's sizzling *What A Man*, Jean Knight's take-no-nonsense *Mr Big Stuff* and Isaac Hayes' pimped masterpiece *Theme From Shaft*.

The 50 tracks on offer here cover the various strains of blues, soul and funk cooked up in that old cinema in South Memphis. It's a wake-up call to those of you who only know Booker T. & The M.G.s' *Soul Limbo* as the theme tune for the BBC's cricket coverage, and *Last Night* by The Mar-Kays as the closing credits music – albeit played by someone else – of Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson's daft TV series *Bottom*.

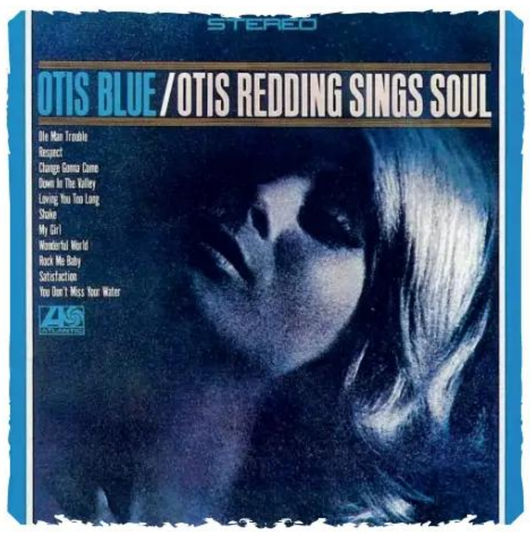
REX

SUPERIOR
The releases that built Stax's reputation

ALBERT KING
Born Under A Bad Sign

The modern blues blueprint.

Despite the album's foreboding title, King won life's lottery when he crossed the threshold at Stax. His status as a blues giant was sealed when William Bell and Booker T. Jones presented him with a bespoke anthem, *Born Under A Bad Sign*, and Booker T. & the M.G.s provided a muscular backing to his booming vocals and ice-pick guitar licks. This album modernised blues, challenged the supremacy of the cats in Chicago and inspired a bunch of great cover versions from the likes of Cream (the title track), Ike & Tina Turner and Free (*The Hunter*) and Stevie Ray Vaughan (*Crosscut Saw*).



OTIS REDDING
Otis Blue

The soul of a Southern genius.

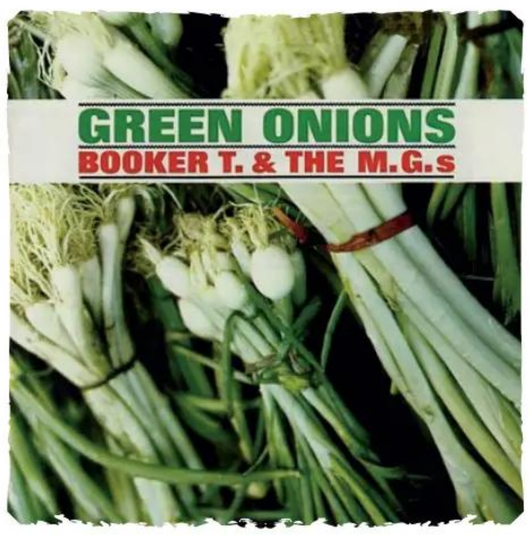
Every cut Otis recorded during his short career at Stax should be cherished, but his third studio album comes loaded with some of his best original work – *Respect*, *I've Been Loving You Too Long* – and exceptional covers. Backed by Booker T. & The M.G.s and The Memphis Horns, a thrilling take on Sam Cooke's '64 stomper *Shake* features along with an emotional reading of the song's original B-side, *A Change Is Gonna Come*. A blast through *Satisfaction* – listed minus its *(I Can't Get No)* prefix – delivers the horn-driven arrangement that Keef had in mind when he first conjured up that killer riff.

ISAAC HAYES
Hot Buttered Soul

Baldly forging a brave new soul.

As one half of a Stax songwriting team with David Porter, pianist Isaac Hayes penned breathtaking 45s like Sam & Dave's *Soul Man*. Given the chance to cut his own records by Stax grand fromage Al Bell, he minted a new progressive soul with sensual extended workouts of Bacharach and David's *Walk On By* and Jimmy Webb's *By The Time I Get To Phoenix*. *Hot Buttered Soul* was Hayes' second solo record; the first had been a commercial disaster. Insisting on complete creative control, he provided a hit album and set out to soundtrack glory with scores for *Shaft* and *Truck Turner*.

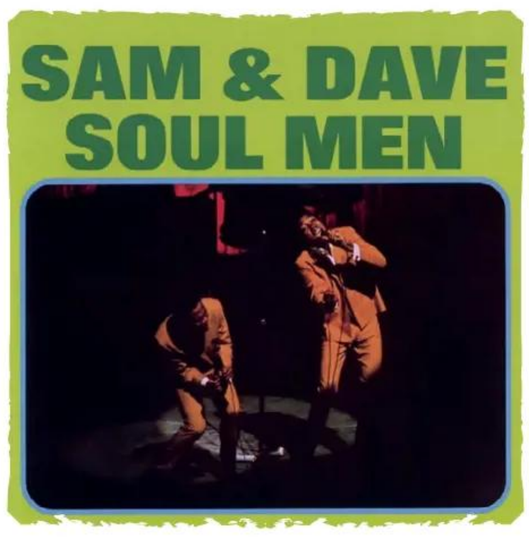
GOOD
Worth a butcher's



BOOKER T. & THE M.G.s
Green Onions

Get to know your Onions.

Forget The Ventures – the greatest American instrumental group was the Stax house band, organist Booker T. Jones and the M.G.s: guitarist Steve Cropper, bassist Donald 'Duck' Dunn and drummer Al Jackson Jr. At the time of the recording of their '62 debut, Lewie Steinberg was the group's bassist, and he does a fine job propelling *Green Onions*, the Stax 45 that made disciples of British mods like The Small Faces and others. *Mo' Onions* and the lazy blues of *Behave Yourself* established the blueprint for every organ-fuelled rock outfit that followed.

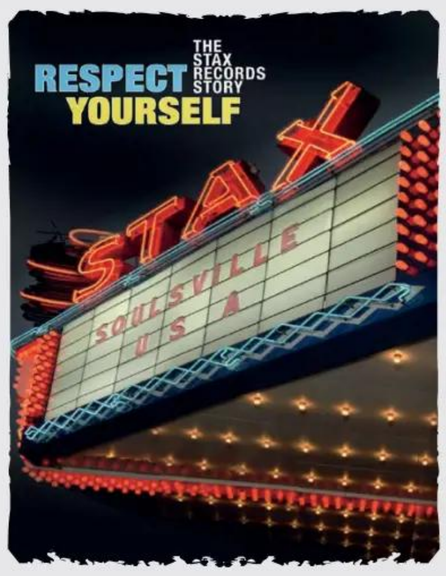


SAM & DAVE
Soul Men

Comin' to ya on a dusty road.

If Booker T. & The M.G.s were the backbone of Stax, the energised duo of Samuel David Moore and Dave Prater were its beating heart. Their third studio album, released in '67, kicks off with arguably the best-known Stax 45, *Soul Man*. If there's a definitive Stax recipe, the ingredients are here: Steve Cropper's brilliantly simple intro guitar lick, the blasting Memphis Horns and the exuberance in Sam & Dave's call and response vocals. Elsewhere, the lads get proto-funky with *Broke Down Piece Of Man* and *Rich Kind Of Poverty,* and tender on *I've Seen What Loneliness Can Do*. Looking beyond the hits pays dividends.

WATCH
Serious eye candy



RESPECT YOURSELF: THE STAX RECORDS STORY

Jaw-dropping history.

This gripping Samuel L Jackson-narrated documentary covers the birth, rise, ugly demise and eventual resurrection of America's greatest soul label. The most poignant moment comes when Steve Cropper breaks down as he recalls the aftermath of Dr King's assassination and its devastating effect on the friendships at Stax.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

BORN UNDER A BAD SIGN
ALBERT KING

SATISFACTION
OTIS REDDING

GREEN ONIONS
BOOKER T. & THE M.G.s

HOLD ON, I'M COMING
SAM & DAVE

YOU DON'T MISS YOUR WATER
WILLIAM BELL

THE MEMPHIS TRAIN
RUFUS THOMAS

KNOCK ON WOOD
EDDIE FLOYD

WALK ON BY
ISAAC HAYES

PRIVATE NUMBER
WILLIAM BELL & JUDY CLAY

A CHANGE IS GONNA COME
OTIS REDDING

I'LL TAKE YOU THERE
THE STAPLE SINGERS

SOUL FINGER
THE BAR-KAYS

TRAMP
OTIS REDDING & CARLA THOMAS

WHEN WILL WE BE PAID FOR THE WORK WE'VE DONE
THE STAPLE SINGERS

WHO'S MAKING LOVE
JOHNNIE TAYLOR

WHAT A MAN
LINDA LYNDELL

SOUL LIMBO
BOOKER T. & THE M.G.s

THEME FROM SHAFT
ISAAC HAYES

HARD TO HANDLE
OTIS REDDING

THE BLUES COLLECTION

HOT, BLUES AND RIGHTEOUS

With *Tres Hombres*, ZZ Top transformed from a Little Ol' Band From Texas into a phenomenon, putting the Lone Star State back on the musical map as they defined the sound of Texan blues.

Words: **Ed Mitchell** Interviews: **Redbeard & Henry Yates**

In 1973, ZZ Top cut a John Lee Hooker-flavoured boogie for their groundbreaking third album *Tres Hombres*. Driven by a rhythm that could piledrive through concrete walls, *La Grange* has since been described by the band's guitarist and leader Billy Gibbons as "a defining moment". It scarcely could have landed at a better time. The blues in Texas was just ticking over. The old guard were dragging themselves around the same old venues while the Lone Star State's brightest hope, Johnny Winter, had moved north to find his audience. So, a pre-beards and pro-Nudie suit ZZ Top – Billy G, bassist Dusty Hill and drummer Frank Beard – were left to mind the store.

As Gibbons hollered those Hooker-esque *'how, how, how, hows'* on *La Grange*, there was no doubt that the Little Ol' Band From Texas were open for business. *Tres Hombres* put Texas blues on the map – and defined its sound to the rest of the world in the process. Everything they'd done so far had been leading up to its release.

"Dusty and I played with the American Blues in Dallas; Billy played with The Moving Sidewalks outta Houston," says Beard of the Top's origins. "Course, we knew of each other and came the time that I needed a job. I went to Houston in a Volkswagen with a set of drums and said, 'Hey, hire me!' So, that's how I met Billy…"

Hill takes up the story: "I moved to Houston not knowing Frank was down there. I was playing in some club and Frank just accidentally walked in. He said, 'You gotta come play with this guy [Billy Gibbons]' and I said OK."

Frank Beard laughs: "I later apologised for that!"

Things started to happen when Texan music impresario Bill Ham happened upon the band and offered his services as manager. He would go on to produce ZZ Top's albums, as well as discovering Nashville star Clint Black and founding country music publishing companies.

Gibbons says: "He wandered by the rehearsal hall and there was quite a clatter going on. He kinda liked what he heard and handed us each a cigar and said, 'Boys, I'm gonna make you stars!'"

Hill: "'…Come with me boys…'"

Beard: "It didn't hurt that he had John

GETTY

Mayall as a house guest at the time either. Kinda impressed us."

Ham said all the right things, claiming he could get the boys a deal on London Records.

"The Rolling Stones had been in London and we thought that was real cool," says Hill. "So, Ham did his thing up there and got us on the label. We cut the first album and travelled with it."

It was thanks to the band's new manager that they found themselves a home at The Warehouse, a 30,000-square-foot music venue on Tchoupitoulas Street in New Orleans. The Grateful Dead, Fleetwood Mac and The Flock opened The Warehouse in January 1970. Jim Morrison played his last show with The Doors there. The Dead and the Allman Brothers were busted by the NOPD when they came to the city to play The Warehouse. Now demolished, it was a lively joint by all accounts. "It was the hottest place in town," remembers local musician Deacon John Moore. "People was lightin' up reefers and nobody said shit. It was like heaven."

Gibbons: "The first night we played there the roof blew off…"

Hill: "We thought we did it!"

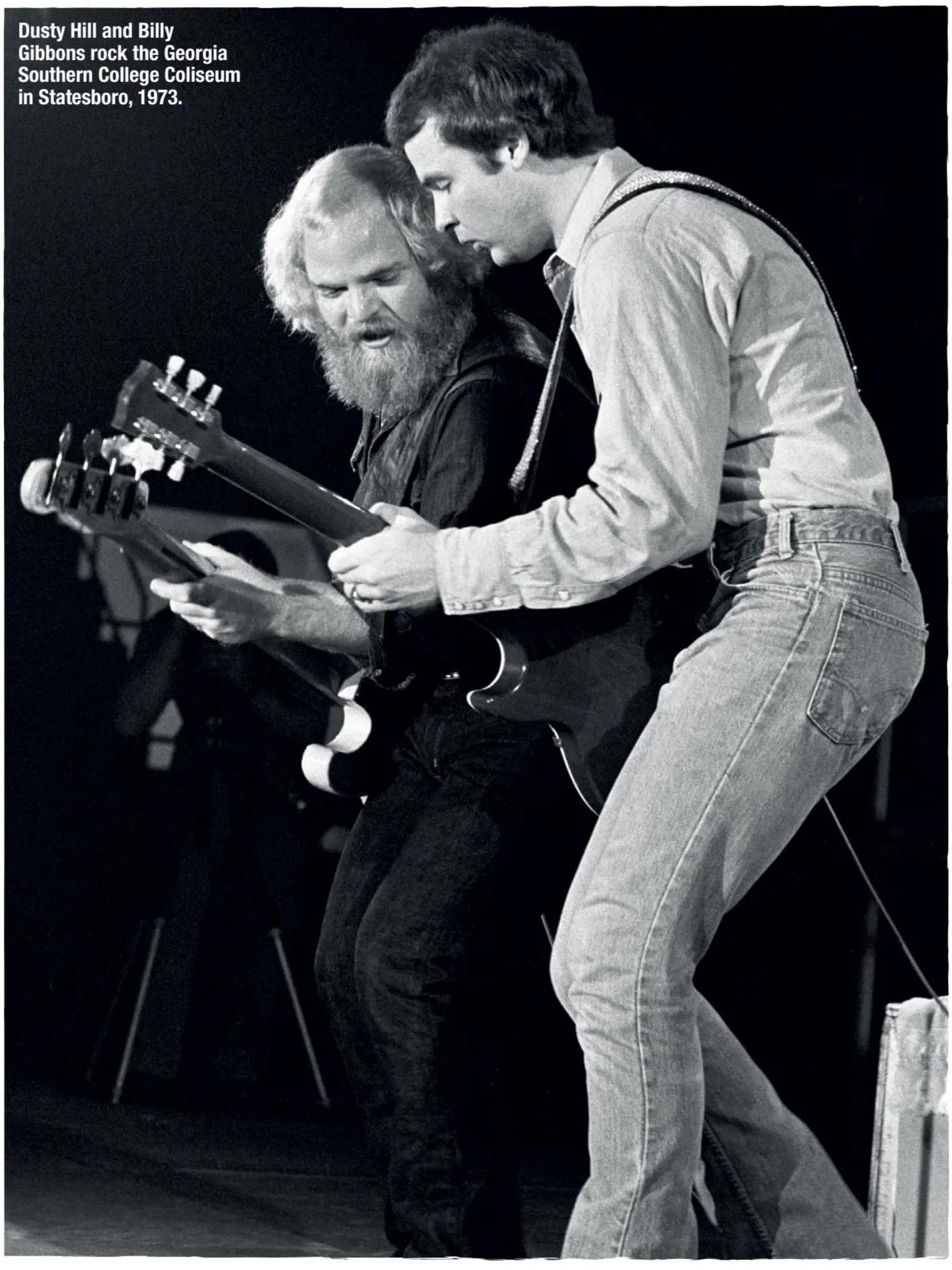
Gibbons: "A hurricane had come through New Orleans and literally took the roof off our heads. We knew we had found the right place to play!"

"Bill conned Don Fox who owned it into letting us play there," continues Hill. "He didn't really know us. It was Mardi Gras so there was no place to stay at all in New Orleans. So, we slept there, up in the dressing room. Don Fox was suspicious. He would put a guard on us so that we wouldn't be dragging women in there."

"We played there many times," drawls Beard, "until one Christmas we gave Don Fox, whose company was called Beaver Productions, a three-legged beaver. He let the beaver get loose in The Warehouse and he ate the stage. The stage collapsed and the building shut down forever."

ZZ Top released two albums prior to cutting *Tres Hombres*: 1971's *ZZ Top's First Album* and *Rio Grande Mud*, which landed a year later. Their manager Bill Ham produced both records for the band.

It was as they worked on their third album that they first crossed paths with Terry



Dusty Hill and Billy Gibbons rock the Georgia Southern College Coliseum in Statesboro, 1973.

Manning, the record producer, songwriter, photographer, recording engineer and artist. A quick dip into the man's enormous list of credits reveals that Manning was part of the production team at Stax in Memphis that had worked their magic on Staple Singers classics *Respect Yourself* and *I'll Take You There*. Even better, in Billy Gibbons' mind, Manning had engineered Led Zeppelin's third record.

"I was a big fan," Manning tells *The Blues*. "I had really liked the first two albums, and had actually put out feelers to the band that I was interested in working with them. And it turned out that Billy Gibbons had heard that I'd engineered and essentially mixed the *Led Zeppelin III* album, which was doing so well. Billy just loved the sound of that, and it turned out that he was also putting out feelers to work with me. So I wasn't surprised at the quality of the songs they were playing, or the sound. I was already a fan. And it's always really nice when you can work on something you really love like that."

Manning already had a sonic ideal in mind for his debut with the Top.

"I wanted the band to sound powerful and tight and just sonically as pure as possible. I'll tell you the philosophy of it: to me, it was very obviously blues-based and they were doing a rock'n'roll-band style of as pure blues as you can fit into that. I think they probably did that particular thing better than anybody ever did it.

"I wanted to keep the blues element, which is the grit and the grunge, where things aren't perfect, but I wanted to fit it into that highly technical framework, where things were perfect in certain ways: sonically, timing-wise. When you try to marry two things together like that, sometimes it can be a disaster, but I think in our case we were fortunate that it did work.

"That album is very big, to me, when I listen now. It's big, powerful and tough-sounding. It reaches enough levels of sonic purity to be pleasing to me in that way – but it's also down and dirty and funky. It all seems to come through somehow. I think it marries pretty well."

My first meeting was with Billy and Bill Ham," Manning continues. "So I didn't meet the whole band the first time. That's when Billy brought the tapes in. The impression you get meeting Billy – then and probably now – has always been that he's an incredibly intelligent person. Of course, he's a nut… in a great way! We're all nuts in the

GETTY, ATLAS ICONS/NEIL ZLOZOWER

Sharp-dressed man: Billy Gibbons bringing red-hot Texas blues to the world.

The Moving Sidewalks with Jimi Hendrix in San Antonio, Texas, February 15, 1968.

music business. He's got his own flamboyance and way of doing things, but underneath that is a very intelligent, philosophically-based person who is interested in the world and the ethereal things, just as much as the things that you can reach right out and see and touch. And I think it shows in his writing and playing especially. There's quite a depth there.

"So it was impressive to meet him. And, of course, Bill Ham was this incredibly astute businessman, and very aware of the things he wanted to do to move the band through level after level in the music business. So that was a great meeting. I didn't meet the other two guys until the next album [*Fandango!*, 1975]. But we all had a lot of fun. They were just happy-go-lucky guys.

"The initial *Tres Hombres* band tracks were done at Robin Hood Studio in Tyler, Texas," recalls Manning. "Then they brought the tapes to me and I did some overdubs, all mixing, editing and sequencing at Ardent Studio A in Memphis. So, I wasn't there for the early tracking. But in that era, they would do several takes until they felt they'd got into the song, and there would be overdubs: tom rolls on certain things, and double-tracks. Some solos and vocals were overdubbed, and a little editing done. So it wasn't all live, but it was, I think, the time when the band played best together as a three-piece live. And it had the live feel, but in enough of a structured way to really bring it to a professional level."

"You get into Memphis and you feel that musical vibe. There's just something that comes over you."

So what prompted the move from the familiar surroundings of The Lone Star State to Memphis, Tennessee? "We've always ascribed to the old phrase 'T for Texas, T for Tennessee'," says Gibbons. "There was something about it. We could never quite figure it out. We decided to go and check it out. I suppose by sticking in Memphis it offered us a little psychological advantage of maybe getting away from the house for a while.

"When you get into Memphis and you start breathing that air and you feel that musical vibe hit you, it inspires you to write. There's just something that comes over you. I don't know if it's this lineage of rich musical heritage. It's still there. So, we go up and live it, breathe it and see what we can do with it."

It seems to have helped. The work ethic on *Tres Hombres* was strong. "We'd usually get started

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after noon," says Manning. "Probably going until midnight. But sometimes Billy and I would stay on for hours at night, just the two of us. Or sometimes I would stay for hours, working on things for the next day. But mostly I'd say we were working 10- or 13-hour days. Sometimes it's a 16-hour day. But what kept you going was just the music."

The fact that Billy Gibbons knew exactly what he wanted helped the sessions barrel along, even if there was the occasional glitch.

Manning says of Gibbons: "He does – and did – have quite strong opinions, but we never had a problem reaching them. One time, I remember accidentally punching in too early or not punching out soon enough, and went over a lick he had played, and he was a little upset that guitar lick was gone! Of course, it happens and I didn't mean it. But we had very few disagreements, and even with that, he was just like, 'Well, sure I did it once, I can do it again.' So he did – and maybe played it even better. It all went very smoothly.

"He was very interested in the technical side and, of course, he's so incredibly intelligent that he could grasp anything. We would do things together. On some songs, for instance, I would be at the console – operating the equipment, the faders on the board and everything – and he would be playing guitar in the control with the lead going out to the amp in the studio. So he's standing right next to me playing. And because he doesn't play guitar in a normal way, sometimes there'd be a sound he could do, but he needed three hands to do it almost. So I would have my hand on the fretboard or my hand on the neck, or some part of the guitar – holding a string down or whatever – while he did these other things. That was kinda crazy. I've never done that with anyone else."

It was the perfect storm, or Texas Twister. ZZ Top had a manager and producer with the drive and ambition to take his charges all the way to, in the words of John Lennon, the "toppermost of the poppermost". They hooked up with an engineer with a clear idea of what the band should sound like. Crucially, for the first time, they had the songs that would take them and the sound of Texas blues to the world stage. This was a band with some stories to tell.

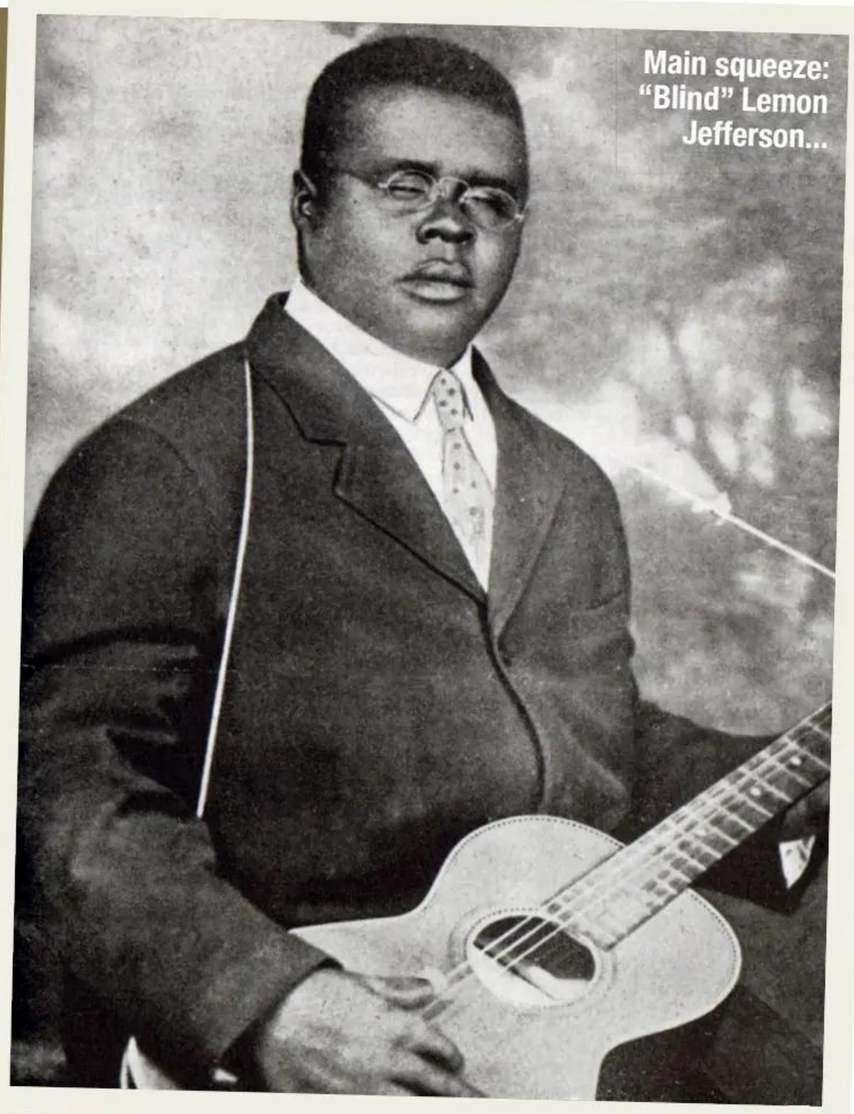
There's *La Grange*, natch, which spills the beans on Miss Jessie Williams' Chicken Ranch, an infamous brothel in La Grange, Texas, that took care of business between 1905 and 1973. Note that last date. The place had always been illegal but in '73 there was a concerted campaign, led by TV reporter Marvin Zindler, to have the establishment closed down for good. The whole sorry affair was the inspiration for the '82 Dolly Parton and Burt Reynolds vehicle *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*.

"It was about the Waldorf Astoria of whorehouses in Texas," Gibbons told *Sounds* back in the mid-70s. "So posh that you couldn't cuss or even be really drunk in front of the girls. When you reach a certain age in Texas, you can go visiting down to Mexico or make a trip to La Grange. At least that's the way it was. Place got closed down soon after we wrote the song. The sheriff was so pissed that he smashed all the ribs of the reporter that broke the story in the papers."

"When we wrote the song and put it out, La Grange was still going strong," says Beard. "It seemed like maybe a month after the song came out when the local newscaster from

The Story Of Texas Blues

From "Blind" Lemon to Gary Clarke Jr, the biggest blues stars are at home in Texas.



Main squeeze: "Blind" Lemon Jefferson...

On November 23, 1936, a young black man knocked on the door of room 414 of the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio, Texas. The room, rented by Brunswick Records, was a makeshift recording studio. Over the next three days, Robert Johnson, the king of the Delta blues singers, played through 16 songs while sat facing the wall with his Gibson acoustic guitar. The tunes he cut during his time in San Antonio included *Come On In My Kitchen*, *Kind Hearted Woman Blues*, *I Believe I'll Dust My Broom*, *Cross Road Blues*, *Terraplane Blues* and *Last Fair Deal Gone Down*.

In 1937, Johnson travelled to Dallas, Texas, for another Brunswick recording session at another makeshift studio – the Vitagraph Building at 508 Park Avenue. After cutting the remainder of his iconic sides, he left for a date with destiny – a bottle of whiskey and poison, or a debt paid to the Devil, depending on what myth you subscribe to.

Of course, Johnson wasn't a Texan – he came from Mississippi – but it's fitting that the most famous and arguably most important blues artist of all time should cut his classic recordings in Texas. The Lone Star State is steeped in blues history, and few places have nurtured the music to the same extent that Texas has, and made it such an important part of its identity. Johnson was in the right place to make blues history and business has been good ever since.

"The main thing to me that really separates Texas blues from other styles is that it's very swingy and very crossed with Western music," says *The Blues* columnist Mike Zito. "It's not uncommon to have a fiddle or a steel guitar in a Texas blues band or song. Music really cross-pollinates in Texas. Blues, country, jazz, big band Texas swing, rock'n'roll, Tejano… they all get mixed up pretty easy in Texas, and all have found a spot in Texas blues."

Considering the massive wealth of musicians, singers and songwriters that have emerged from the state over the past 100 years, it's remarkable that in recent years, many people have come to define Texas blues simply by three initials: SRV. No one is disputing Stevie Ray Vaughan's huge influence on the contemporary blues scene – his Fender Stratocaster-fuelled guitar tone alone is aped by more young musicians than probably anyone else's – but he's just one figure in the roll call of important Texan artists.

There are exceptions – Big Mama Thornton's booming voice and intimidating harmonica blast, for example – but as Mike Zito says, "In Texas it's all about the GEE-TAR!"

Damn right. A mere scratch at the surface reveals that Texas gave us six-string magicians such as Albert Collins, W.C. Clark, Roy Gaines, Lowell Fulson, Johnny 'Guitar' Watson, Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, Johnny Copeland and Freddie King.

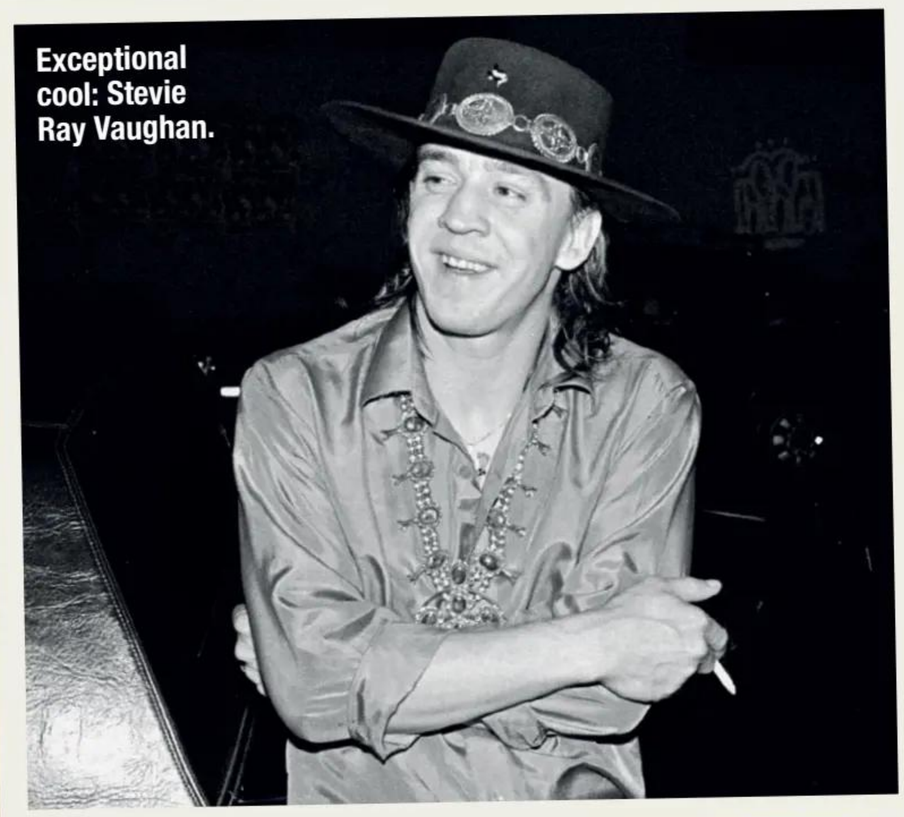
Guitarists like the Vaughan brothers – Stevie Ray and Jimmie, natch – Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown and Albert Collins put the word 'tone' in bold letters on their personal manifestos. That is, if you want to play Texas blues the right way, you gotta have a great sound. It's no coincidence that when Fender launched a hotter overwound version of its iconic single-coil pickup, they named them 'Texas Specials'.

The first Texan blues practitioner to vamp his way into the history books was 'Blind' Lemon Jefferson. Born Lemon Henry Jefferson (yes, Lemon was his real Christian name) on September 24, 1893, in Coutchman, Texas, the musician now known as the Father of the Texas Blues cut classics like *Black Snake Moan* and *See That My Grave Is Kept Clean*.

By his late teens, Jefferson was paying regular visits to Dallas, where he fell in with fellow blues musician Lead Belly in the Deep Ellum district of the city. It was there in around 1917 that he met Aaron Thibeaux Walker, better known as the now iconic T-Bone Walker. It was Jefferson who would teach Walker to play guitar.

Jefferson's wish to see his grave kept clean wasn't to be – not immediately at least. After he died in Chicago at 10am on December 19, 1929, Paramount Records paid for the return of his body to Texas. He was buried in an unmarked grave at the Wortham Negro Cemetery (later Wortham Black Cemetery). Far from his grave being kept clean, it was unmarked until 1967, when a Texas Historical Marker was erected. In 2007, the cemetery's name was changed to Blind Lemon Memorial Cemetery. These days his grave is kept clean, or at least the general area is – no one knows which plot holds the blues pioneer's bones.

In November 1947, T-Bone Walker released *Call It Stormy Monday (But Tuesday Is Just as Bad)*, which is commonly referred to as *Stormy Monday*. The song inspired B.B. King and plenty of others to take up the electric guitar. King said: "My greatest musical debt is to T-Bone… *Stormy Monday* was the first tune.


Exceptional cool: Stevie Ray Vaughan.

'They call it Stormy Monday,' sang T-Bone, *'but Tuesday's just as bad.'* Yes, Lord! The first line, the first thrilling notes, the first sound of his guitar, and the attitude in his voice was riveting. I especially loved *Stormy Monday*, and I still sing it today."

However, the real heavyweight of Texas blues was Freddie King. One of 'The Three Kings', sharing his monarchy with B.B. and Albert, Freddie was born in Gilmer, Upshur County, Texas, on September 3, 1934. If the 'Texas Cannonball' had never cut another record after his '61 instrumental classic *Hide Away And Dance Away With Freddy King* (he changed the spelling of his name to 'Freddie' shortly after its release), he would still be one of the most influential blues guitarists who ever unleashed his vibrato on a pentatonic scale.

He was a big man but he had the sweetest voice – listen to his sweeping falsetto on *Have You Ever Loved A Woman* (1960) for the evidence – and guys like Stevie Ray Vaughan, his brother Jimmie, and Grateful Dead icon Jerry Garcia studied the great man's licks like they were the Dead Sea Scrolls. Every note that King managed to wring from his Gibson ES-345 was mirrored by his facial expressions and sweat-drenched shirts. One of the blues' greatest showmen, he was a true one-off.

Hide Away And Dance Away With Freddy King is a blast. While *Hide Away* and *The Stumble* would ultimately became the best-known tracks, *Sen-Sa-Shun* and *San-Ho-Zay* – the latter a live staple of Chicago great Magic Sam – proved that instrumental blues could be every bit as powerful as any other format.

King's influence was felt way beyond Texas and the US border. As early as 1963, Eric Clapton caught wind of King's *Hide Away*, the song he would ultimately rework and cut as *Hideaway* in 1966 for the *John Mayall Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton* album, aka 'The Beano' record. Peter Green recorded *The Stumble* with Mayall on the 1967 *A Hard Road* album.

Freddie kicked off his beautifully crafted boots for the last time in 1976. They remain unfilled. That said, a bunch of white kids had made their mark on the scene by then. ZZ Top were international ambassadors for the cause of Texas blues by that point – see the main feature for much more on them – while Johnny Winter was seen as something of a figurehead for Lone Star blues, even if he had moved away, and spent his time fruitfully cutting Chicago blues with his friend and mentor, Muddy Waters.

The kid had been anointed by blues royalty in the shape of B.B. King, in the same manner that Joe Bonamassa would be many years later. "I was 17," Winter told *The Blues* magazine in 2012. "It was a club in Beaumont, Texas, called The Raven. I heard it on the radio that B.B. King was gonna be there. So, I gotta hear this. I had fake ID and got in."

Winter wasn't just there to hear his idol play. "Yeah, I bothered him," he said with a laugh. "I wanted to see him play but I really wanted him to hear me. I kept sending my band members up to ask him if it was alright that I played."

What Johnny and his friends didn't realise was that B.B. was eyeing them with suspicion. "We were the only white people in the club and he'd been having tax problems. He thought we were from the IRS! He finally let me play and I got a standing ovation."

B.B.'s response? "Johnny was good."

In 1978, Leona, Texas native Albert Collins – The Master Of The Telecaster - released *Ice Pickin'*, his sixth album, and his first for Alligator Records. The record's title paid tribute to Collins' singular trebly guitar tone, and it's his Texas blues masterpiece.

Our consulting editor Charles Shaar Murray summed the album up in his Collins buyer's guide in issue 4 of *The Blues*: "By now, Collins was a totally happening vocalist/frontman whose singing had almost caught up with his guitar, and a virtuoso stage performer: any crowd-pleasing stunt he hadn't learned, mastered and used probably didn't work. Favouring organ and horns rather than piano and harp, he worked in three basic modes: shuffles, slow blues and a nasty funk bump. *Ice Pickin'* burst at the seams with killer examples of all of them (most of the original lyrics written by his wife Gwen), which would stay on the setlist for life: *Honey Hush!*, *Too Tired* and *Cold Cold Feeling*, to name but three.

And his thoughts on the rest of Collins' studio career? "*Frostbite* is almost as good as *Ice Pickin'* and *Cold Snap*, and *Don't Lose Your Cool* and *Iceman* are almost as good as *Frostbite*. The message is: there are no bad Albert Collins albums."

The man who would ultimately by crowned king of modern Texas blues was just a few years away from releasing the album that would become the genre's blueprint. *Texas Flood*, Stevie Ray Vaughan's 1983 debut album, was just what the blues needed. Its sound and vitality can still be heard on countless records released this year.

SRV was the full package: young, gifted and exceptionally cool. He took his influences – Freddie, Albert and Jimi – added some Tex-Mex heat and cooked up a tonal recipe that still has millions of guitarists looking for that same magic formula. *Rolling Stone* might have criticised Vaughan's lack of originality and a distinctive style, but few others agreed.

Stevie Ray Vaughan was the latest in a long line of Texas blues musicians that gave the music an image. It's there in Freddie King's tailored suits and big red Gibson guitar; in Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown's leather-embossed Gibson Firebird; in Billy Gibbons' hirsute visage, hairier guitars and vintage cars; and it's abundant in SRV's Native American headdress, beat to hell and back, Number One vintage Strat and his fedora hat. The blues just looked different in Texas. It was cooler somehow.

Freddie King, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Johnny Winter and countless others are no longer around, of course, and many blues fans are pinning their hopes for the next Texas blues superstar on Gary Clark Jr. Maybe he will be the one to keep The Lone Star State's blues in the game. If not, it's a damn big place, and history has shown that there's never been a shortage of great home-grown blues talent in Texas.

Houston raised the big stink and got the place closed down, which created national publicity. We kinda wrote the song as a celebration. It ended up being a eulogy."

The Chicken Ranch was so popular that punters were following their one-track minds right to its front door more than two years after it was shut down.

"Everyone knew about the place," adds Hill. "I mean, it was no secret. This guy that caused the stir about it was doing just that – causing a stir. We had a couple of people blame us for the closing but we didn't let any cats out of the bag or anything. I think that was already in the works. We didn't know about it."

"I remember *La Grange* quite well," says Manning of the song's birth. "It immediately shone, to me. It just had an incredible sparkle. One thing I do remember is that it was quite a trick to mix it because Billy does so much speaking – y'know, these little asides and comments – and there were several more on the recording, and we were trying to decide which ones to erase. I remember it was quite a hassle, manually moving everything. We worked on it until we really felt we had the definitive version, without too much of that. I remember one statement Billy made about *'going halfway round the world and back again'*. We left that one out."

Another track, *Master Of Sparks* also has a strange tale at its heart.

Manning says: "I love the lead guitar on that. I remember going down the hall, to get some water or go to the restroom or something, and then coming back in the room while it was playing, and that guitar was wailing, and I was blown away a second time by coming in fresh and hearing it. I just loved how he played it.

"Billy would tell us the story behind the lyric – which he tells in the song, but you don't quite hear it all, or understand what's going on. This was a true event that had happened. And hearing it, and the incredible, insane teenage pranks they were doing that should not have been going on – then hearing the song about it – was very special."

"We built a steel ball out of cage wire," Gibbons explained to *Sounds* back in the day. "The thing to do on a Saturday night in Texas was to put it in the back of a pickup truck, go about 60 miles an hour and slide it out the back. Course, we kept it a secret from everybody 'cause if our folks had found out, we'd all been off to military school.

"Sure enough, come sundown we got out there to find both sides of the road lined with cars waitin' to see this. Some guy even had the back end of his pickup truck loaded down with ice and cold beer – he was givin' away free beer.

"So, after realising what was coming down, both of us loaded ourselves in for the last ride and I guess we must of been going 60 miles an hour, drunk, laughin' like hell and, when we rolled ourselves out, we hit the ground so hard it squashed the ball out like an egg. Needless to say, it didn't roll too well and we spun off the road and hit a fence, tore bout a hundred yards of barbed wire down. I was screamin', he was bleedin', but needless to say we were awarded the coveted title of having done the wildest thing."

"There was a seat bolted inside," adds Hill. "Whoever was in the seat, the other ones pushed it off the back of the pickup going about 60."

From left: Dusty Hill, Billy Gibbons and Frank Beard in 1975.

So which of the Top wound up in the sphere of almost certain death or injury? Dusty?

"No, that would be illegal," he chuckles. "I'll put it this way: I was once six-foot three."

Dusty Hill feels that the vibe of *Tres Hombres* was influenced by the border radio that owned the Southern airwaves in the 50s and 60s. He explains: "There were these radio stations outta Mexico – like 500,000 watts – and they'd just blanket the area way up to the Mid West. And you were privy to hear a lot of blues on this station that you wouldn't hear on a regular rock'n'roll station back then. It had a lot of influence on us growing up."

"The scam on these radio stations was that you could buy 30 minutes' programming for anything," adds Beard. "You could get prayer cloths signed by Jesus Christ himself, or goat-gland operations to improve your sex life…"

Gibbons adds: "200 baby chicks. Three dollars."

Hill: "And they didn't have overnight delivery back then!"

Gibbons: "Yeah, things got a little dark at that end of the dial…"

GETTY x2

"We spun off the road. I was screamin', he was bleedin', but we got the title of having done the wildest thing."

One of the unusual aspects of *Tres Hombres* was the edit between opening track *Waiting For The Bus* and *Jesus Just Left Chicago*.

"The songs weren't recorded that way or planned that way," says Manning, "but when I was sequencing the album, and we decided that one song would start and the next song would come after it, I remember really feeling those two could be like one very powerful recording. So I just cut it that way, like there was no space between them. It was just me, Billy and Bill in there, and I think a couple of other people didn't quite like it and it was a shock to them because it was so abrupt-sounding. But once you'd heard it a few times, it was like, 'I can't hear it any other way now.' Like, it just had to be like that. So I certainly remember that. That was probably my best edit ever!"

Tres Hombres featured a feast of Tex-Mex vittles across its gatefold sleeve. The band remember that particular photo shoot very well.

Hill says: "We were all there. They had to take quite a few photos because we kept nibbling at it. 'No, it's just for the camera.' Well, get some more!"

Beard: "We ate that meal… when it was over."

Hill: "Except for the beer, which by the time the photo shoot was over was no good."

The brewery that supplied the beer has since gone the way of The Warehouse and the Chicken Ranch: "We probably caused that," laughs Beard. "Not the closing of La Grange. The Southern Select Brewery, maybe so… That place, Leo's Mexican Restaurant that provided that

food, literally kept ZZ Top alive during the first year or two that we were a band. All we had to do was present ourselves at the door and say we were hungry and they would feed us. If we didn't have any money, we'd bring it to them later."

Hill: "Leo, the old man, actually rode with Pancho Villa when he was like 13 or something… a very interesting guy."

Beard: "There is the Mexican girl in there [the inner sleeve], in the one little photo."

"She was the star of the Mexican revolution," says Gibbons. "She took a bullet yet kept her strength and sanity and held the flag that either Villa or Zapata had…"

Hill: "…one of those guys right?"

Beard: "Or both!" [They all laugh at their patchy knowledge of Mexican history.]

Hill: "You had no idea there was such history in this album cover!"

The album's look and sound was undeniably bad-to-the-bone Texan, yet for some reason the band found themselves lumped in with the stars of the then exploding Southern rock scene.

"They took the whole South and created a whole genre," says Beard.

Hill: "'Southern boogie bands.'"

Beard begins counting them off: "Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Allman Brothers, Molly Hatchet…"

Hill: "Marshall Tucker…"

Beard: ".38 Special, Point Blank…"

Hill: "They wanted to call us *something*."

Terry Manning doesn't buy the comparison with the Southern rock bands either. "Nobody plays quite like Billy," he offers. "I guess nobody played quite like any of the three of them at that point. But he sorta rises above the greatness of all of them, really, to my ears. In that he just does not play guitar the same way that other people played it then – and really, most people still don't play it that way.

"It did sound different. It didn't sound like Led Zeppelin: even though I mixed them both, on very similar equipment, they don't sound the same at all. It's not about me, and it's never about equipment or mics or consoles or anything like that. It's always about the band and the artist.

"My job has always been to take a band and just make them the best version they can be, of what they are, without imposing on them what I want or what anyone else wants. So yeah, I think *Tres Hombres* does sound different to any other album of that era. There have been copycat things and tribute bands that have tried to achieve that since…"

The album wasn't just a big hit with the punters – Billy G loved the way it turned out. It's no accident that Terry Manning went on to work with the tres hombres of ZZ Top for years after they cut that landmark third record. He also engineered their biggest hit to date, the '86 colossus *Eliminator*, the band's eighth studio record.

"I've got this beautiful postcard that Billy sent me when he got back home and really stopped and listened," says Manning. "He was just so thrilled with it. I did know at the time that this was not going to be a run-of-the-mill everyday album.

"On the *Eliminator* album, I remember saying to several people, 'I guarantee you – this will be a huge hit.' I rarely say that, but in the case of *Eliminator*, I absolutely felt it. And on *Tres Hombres*, I had a real good feeling about it. I just knew this would push them up…"

Frank Beard: "We've always stayed true to what we wanted to do."

"By *Tres Hombres*, the band were burning on all cylinders – it was the highlight of their era."

"For me, it was the high point of several things coming together," says Manning. "Previous to *Tres Hombres*, the band had recorded and mixed in different places, but this [album] was running at a higher level of technical expertise and quality equipment. Plus the band had been together, had been through the recording process twice before, and they had it down. They were really burning on all cylinders by that point. It was the highlight of their era of playing together. A few later albums were also great, but they didn't quite have that early fire still going, maybe – or at least all the players might not have.

"*Tres Hombres* is really one of their two high points," Manning continues. "Later on, we went to more modern techniques of recording. I'm talking about *Eliminator*. It wasn't worse: it was a great album, and it sold even more. But it didn't have that togetherness, with everyone really firing it out, in a rock-blues kinda way.

"*Eliminator* was much more Billy and me doing things after hours, kinda overdubbing things, rather than just the band playing. *Tres Hombres* was almost like an incredible live performance. Of course, it wasn't live – they were overdubbing things – but it was much more of the band at their absolute playing-together height.

"So I have two favourites, and I can't choose. It's like choosing your favourite son. *Tres Hombres* being the band at their powerhouse live height. And then *Eliminator*, for their new style, with the machines added and the new production –

GETTY X2

ZZ Top as MTV darlings and globe-straddling rock stars in the *Eliminator* era.

Digging Deep

Everyone knows ZZ Top but here are some blues pioneers you probably haven't heard of.

Texas has a fantastically rich and varied history of black music-making. Once the 'hoods of Dallas, Houston and San Antonio resonated with street musicians, theatre singers, itinerant barrelhouse pianists and serenading string bands.

The teenage Victoria Spivey chanted her *T. B. Blues,* while Sippie Wallace (above right) warned her sex, *'Women, be wise! Keep your mouth shut! Don't advertise your man!'*

Texas Alexander sang long, meandering blues, like the meditations of a lonely field hand staring at the vast Texas sky. Whistlin' Alex Moore gave throaty approval to his girlfriend's blue bloomers – and he didn't mean her hydrangeas.

You might run across two tough guitar-playing blueswomen, Geeshie Wiley and Elvie Thomas; or the Dallas String Band, dispensing barbershop harmony and mandolin rags; or the stocky figure of Henry Thomas, whose panpipe riff on *Bull-Doze Blues* inspired Canned Heat's *Goin' Up The Country.*

Piano players like Pinetop Burks and Son Becky did the rounds of the logging camps, jumping freight trains, playing long and hard for weekending roustabouts. Most of them died young, but Buster Pickens and Robert Shaw lived to recall that music on LPs.

In the 30s, a fellow named Joe Pullum began singing, *'Black gal, black gal, what makes your head so hard? Lord, I would come to see you, but your bad man has got me barred.'* His voice was eerily high, as if it belonged to a choirboy who'd taken the wrong path, but voice and song alike were widely copied, and *Black Gal* became one of the hits of the period.

Another big song to come out of Texas in the '30s was Curtis Jones's *Lonesome Bedroom Blues*, described as "a sucker punch into the gut of the single man living in a rooming house and spending his evenings in a bar with a jukebox". Similar stark piano cadences marked a hit of the post-war years, Mercy Dee Walton's *One Room Country Shack*, a masterpiece of poor-folks' poetry: *'I wake up every night around midnight, peoples, I just can't sleep no more – only crickets and frogs to keep me company, and the wind howlin' round my door.'*

And so much more. The unfailingly rhythmic Lil' Son Jackson, the unfailingly erratic Smokey Hogg and, out on his own, George Coleman (left). Known as 'Bongo Joe', he had a pitch outside the Alamo where he beat on an oil drum and chanted surrealist proto-rap.

TONY RUSSELL

The Top three today are still going strong.

"We've done this band longer than we've done anything else – longer than any marriage I've had."

but still maintaining the blues and rock element. Those two are by far my favourites."

Today, 40 years on, they might have a few more coins in the bank, and Billy G and Dusty Hill have remained committed to their trademark facial hair – Frank Beard famously hasn't – but they're still the Little Ol' Band From Texas. "We played pretty close to Texas for a good while – Louisiana, Oklahoma," says Hill. "When we started getting up north, most people expected us to move to Los Angeles or New York because that's just the way it was done back then."

That wasn't on the cards, of course. And it shouldn't come as a surprise that the three amigos who, in the words of Texan radio DJ Redbeard, "spent four decades taking Texas to the world", have stayed faithful to their original line-up.

"We talk about this among ourselves a lot," says Beard. "We've done this band longer than we've done anything else. Longer than we went to school, certainly longer than any marriage that I've had. I mean, it is like being married to these two guys. It just goes to the fact that we've always stayed true to what we wanted to do, which was just play music and have a good time and try not to make it any harder than that."

Many thanks to Redbeard, Mark Fischer and Terry Manning for their contribution to this feature. The ZZ Top interview was sourced at www.inthestudio.net.

ROSS HALFIN, GETTY X2

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Johnny Winter: a tan for all seasons.

Johnny Winter

Bringing Texas white-blues lightning to the world since 1969 – but on which albums did Johnny Winter flash brightest, strike hardest and blaze hottest?

JOHN DAWSON WINTER III, like his near-contemporary scion of the Texan upper-middle class William F Gibbons, was first exposed to blues and R&B because that was what his family's maid listened to as she cooked and cleaned. He identified with the bluesmen because, like him, they were the wrong colour: they were black and he, as an albino, was too white. As a result, his own music was what his original bassist Tommy Shannon called 'power blues': "blues, but played with the power of rock'n' roll."

Onstage from the age of 15, he played blues, rock, pop and anything else anybody would pay for. Ten years later, following a rave review in *Rolling Stone*, his hot-wired, superspeedy blues-rock guitar and striking looks got him signed by a New York-based manager and sent out into the world to compete with Cream, Hendrix and Led Zeppelin. Soon persuaded to ditch his Texas blues band and go full-on hard rock, he scored his biggest success with the bludgeoning *Johnny Winter And*, acquiring a major heroin habit in the process.

In 1976, tiring of arena rock, he returned to his blues roots, producing a series of magnificent autumnal albums for Muddy Waters and gaining, for the first time, the blues cred he'd always craved. He's played mainly blues ever since, but – to quote the critics – as 'the bare electric skeleton of rock dancing in the mind-juice river' or 'an IBM computer playing a 50-string guitar', while his equally distinctive singing has been compared to 'a tuneable belch' or 'a coyote gargling with sandpaper'.

Frailer and more spectral than ever as his 70th birthday approaches: every now and then it's kinda hard to tell, but he's still alive and well. *CSM*

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction

SECOND WINTER
Columbia Legacy

Combines scorching covers and stomping originals to spectacular effect.

His official major-label debut was both underweight and overcooked, lacking the raw spontaneity of his Austin demos, but the 'three-sided' *Second Winter* brought it all home, mapping JW's blues-rock landscape in all its idiosyncratic glory.

Adding younger brother Edgar to the team on sax and keys, it had a great Richard Avedon sleeveshot and a prime selection of originals and covers, including the 120mph fireball version of Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited*, Little Richard's *Miss Ann* slowed down to a languorous Lowell Fulson-style shuffle and a hectic sprint through Chuckleberry's *Johnny B Goode* which should be entirely unnecessary but somehow isn't.

And the homebrewed tunes which made up the final vinyl side were just spectacular: the stomping slide epics *I Love Everybody* and *Fast Life Rider*, the hyperspeed *Hustled Down In Texas* and the jazzy *I Hate Everybody* all revealed Winter to be more than just another white boy lost in the blues.

And, to add to this embarrassment of Roadhouse Deluxe riches, the Legacy edition comes bundled with a scorchio 1970 live set cut at the Albert Hall (and including an early version of bro' Edgar's *Frankenstein*, not to mention his finest enraged-bee vocal impression on the Nashville Teens' *Tobacco Road*).

Relegated to the vaults after Winter dumped his original band in favour of the former McCoys, it was replaced on the release schedule by the subtle-it-ain't-overwhelming-it-is *Live Johnny Winter And*, loaded with nuggets such as *Good Morning Little Schoolgirl* and *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, which turned out to be his all-time bestseller. Still, better 43 years late than never.

REX FEATURES

SUPERIOR
The releases that built his reputation

NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES
Columbia Legacy

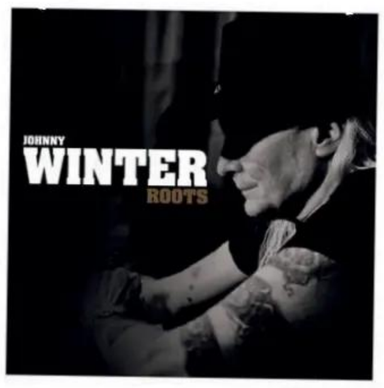
Career-defining performances with Muddy Waters' band.

In the immediate wake of his triumphant production of Muddy Waters' 1977 comeback album *Hard Again* and the subsequent tour, Winter took the same band – including James Cotton (harp), Pinetop Perkins (pianner) and the great Willie 'Big Eyes' Smith (drums), not to mention The Big Mud himself stepping up for a duet vocal on *Walkin' Through The Park* – into the same studio to cut an album of his own. Their relaxed Chicago-approved whomp smoothed down Winter's tendency towards hyperthyroid excess without dimming his fire or softening his punch, and he rose to the occasion with some of the most passionate and authentic performances of his career.

THE PROGRESSIVE BLUES EXPERIMENT
Capitol

Rough'n'ready whiteboy blues.

Two of the words in this album's title are accurate, and one of them is 'the'. There's nothing 'progressive' or 'experimental' here: it's a live set by the original trio cut as four-track demos in an empty Austin club, pre-dating his breakthrough and the Columbia deal. It's as rough, raw and funky as whiteboy blues ever got: straight-up live (apart from Blind Willie McTell's *Broke Down Engine*, where Winter overdubs harp and mandolin atop his National Steel acoustic) and soaked to the bone in the influences of Muddy Waters, B.B. King and – on a hectic *Mean Town Blues* – John Lee Hooker, all cranked up and adrenalised to the max.



ROOTS
Megaforce

Guest-laden stroll into classics.

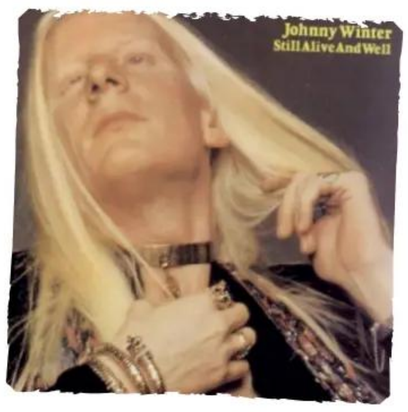
The Thin White Flash's most recent album as of now, and the title is the giveaway. Winter anatomises his early inspirations (Elmore James, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Little Walter, T-Bone Walker, Jimmy Reed and more) in the company of guests (Vince Gill, Susan Tedeschi, bro' Edgar, John Medeski and fellow slidemeisters Derek Trucks, Sonny Landreth and Warren Haynes) who add to the fun bigtime without even getting in the skinny guy's way. From anybody else, this rummage through the bluesily rocking treasurehouse of the 1950s would considered majorly hi-energy; from the perennially hot-wired Mr Winter, it's pleasantly, funkily chilled and laid-back: passionate intensity recollected and recreated in (comparative) tranquillity.

GOOD
Worth a butcher's

GUITAR SLINGER
Alligator

A blast for independence.

Freed from the big label, the rock manager and their demands that he court the mainstream, Winter signed to Chicago-based blues indie Alligator in the 80s. He borrowed Albert Collins' bass monster Johnny B Gayden and cut three albums – the other two being *Serious Business* and *Third Degree*, both also deserving of your attention, though the latter's the better – cementing his identity as a born-again bluesman in the Texas tradition. After one more disastrous attempt at major label arena rock, he went blues indie again in the 1990s with two PointBlank albums (*Let Me In* and *Hey, Where's Your Brother*, respectively guesting Dr John and bro Edgar), which bit almost as deep as the Alligators.

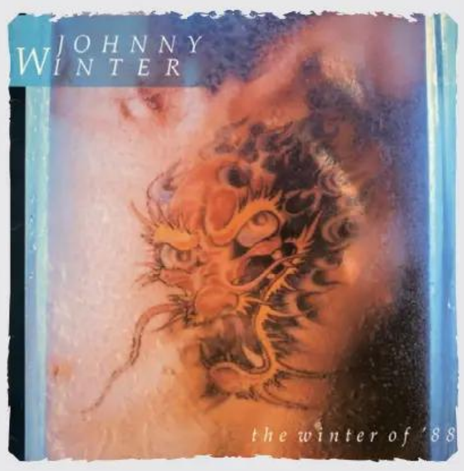


STILL ALIVE AND WELL
Columbia Legacy

Revived and kicking.

This 1973 post-rehab 'comeback' album is still Winter's grooviest, funkiest and most likeable 'rock' effort, though the better, bluesier half of the *And Live* album runs it close. Produced by Rick Derringer, who contributed a few guitar cameos as well as writing two of the standout tracks (the title song and the gorgeous country ballad *Cheap Tequila*), Winter's in full-on 'giant refreshed' mode, kicking off with a rousing, roaring *Rock Me Baby*. Elsewhere: the grittily bluesy *Too Much Seconal*, a hectic slide shuffle called *Rock & Roll* and *Silver Train*, a *Goats Head Soup* song the Stones gave him even before they cut it themselves.

AVOID
Like the plague



WINTER OF '88
MCA/Universal

Stadium fandango misfires.

After the Alligator trilogy, this was Winter's final assault on the arena-rock big league, teaming up with ZZ Top producer Terry Manning. Unfortunately, what should have been a no-brainer turned out to be exactly that: the Rev Willy G is a postmodern retro-futurist whereas Winter is a straight-up traditionalist whose 50s-based blues-rock aesthetic sits uncomfortably with drum machines and 80s-style Big Guitars. No wonder that he's rolled with Yer Proper Blues ever since.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

MEAN TOWN BLUES
THE PROGRESSIVE BLUES EXPERIMENT

HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED
SECOND WINTER

I LOVE EVERYBODY
SECOND WINTER

ROCK ME BABY
STILL ALIVE AND WELL

STILL ALIVE AND WELL
STILL ALIVE AND WELL

TV MAMA
NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES

DON'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ME
GUITAR SLINGER

THIRD DEGREE
THIRD DEGREE

GOT MY MOJO WORKIN'
ROOTS

BROKEN DOWN TRAIN
THE PROGRESSIVE BLUES EXPERIMENT

TOO MUCH SECONAL
STILL ALIVE AND WELL

SILVER TRAIN
STILL ALIVE AND WELL

MISS ANN
SECOND WINTER

FAST LIFE RIDER
SECOND WINTER

WALKIN' THROUGH THE PARK
NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES

CHEAP TEQUILA
STILL ALIVE AND WELL

ROCK & ROLL
STILL ALIVE AND WELL

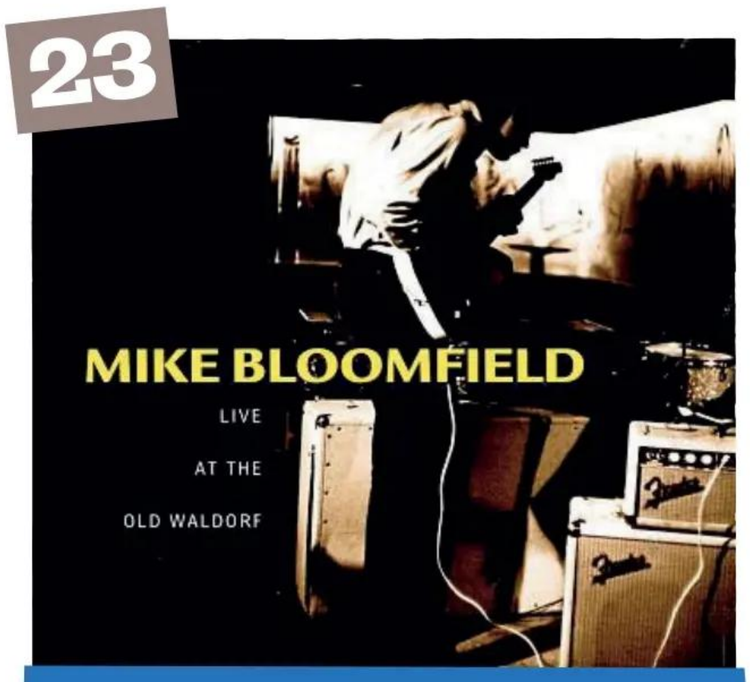
THE BLUES COLLECTION

23 GREATEST LIVE ALBUMS

B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Etta James and others fight it out in our countdown of the live blues records that changed the world...

Words: **Rich Chamberlain, Alice Clark, Jamie Hailstone, Charles Shaar Murray, Ed Mitchell, David West**

23

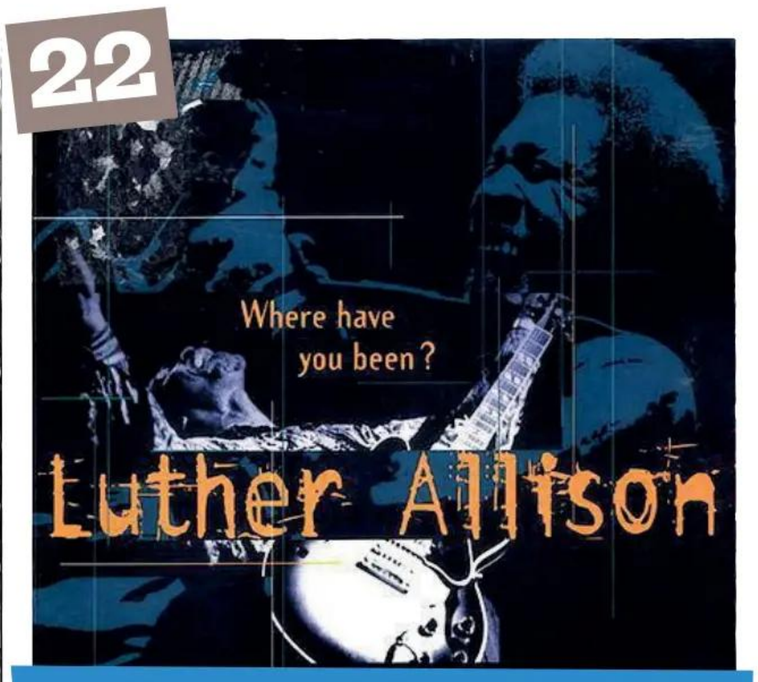


MIKE BLOOMFIELD
Live At The Old Waldorf
1998

A hot property he might have been in the mid-60s with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, and Bob Dylan on *Highway 61 Revisited,* but by the 70s Mike Bloomfield maintained a lower profile and the heroin addiction hat would eventually take his life. Yet *Live At The Old Waldorf,* compiled from a 1976/1977 San Francisco nightclub residency, with a single '74 radio session cut, captures Bloomfield on fearless form. Bloomfield always strived for undiscovered musical corners to explore and *Bad Luck Baby* and *The Sky Is Crying* foreground his quicksilver slide playing while *Buried Alive In The Blues* has a groove that's ten miles wide.

DAVID WEST

22



LUTHER ALLISON
Where Have You Been/Live At Montreux
1996

This collection spans eighteen years and Luther Allison's four appearances at the famous Swiss festival. Beginning in 1976, Luther bites into *Gambler's Blues* and *Sweet Home Chicago* with velocity and venom while *Little Red Rooster* finds his guitar squawking angrily at saxophonist Richard Drake who fires right back. Sole '83 cut, *The Sky Is Crying,* maintains boiling point before the tracks from the '84 show tap into a more laidback R&B vibe as Luther joins forces with the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section. The Memphis Horns join Luther on stage in 1994 to cut *Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is,* while *Bad Love* closes the record with a big, brooding blues.

DAVID WEST

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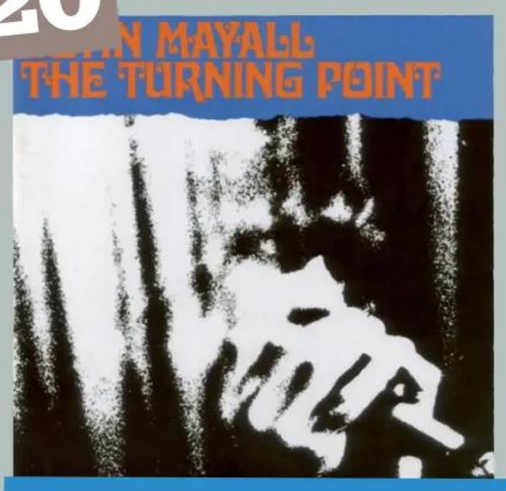
ALEXIS KORNER'S BREAKDOWN GROUP
Blues From The Roundhouse ***1957***

Documenting the birth of British blues prior to the formation of Blues Incorporated, *Blues From The Roundhouse* features the first recordings of Cyril Davies and Alexis Korner, concentrating on songs from Leadbelly's repertoire, including *Leaving Blues* and *Boll Weevil*. While the skiffle arrangement of *Skip To My Lou* betrays their Britishness, this is no document of faltering first steps; renditions of *Ella Speed* and *Roundhouse Stomp* reveal the successful adoption of the nuances and tonalities of American blues. Davies passed away in 1964 aged 31, but these recordings were the wellspring for every British blues musician that followed.

DAVID WEST

20



JOHN MAYALL
The Turning Point
1969

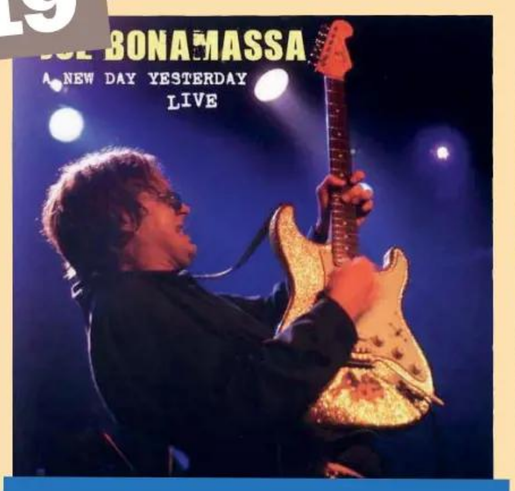
Recorded at Bill Graham's Fillmore East in New York on July 12, 1969, after the break-up of the Bluesbreakers two months earlier – a result of Mayall suggesting his then guitarist Mick Taylor as the replacement for the recently deceased Brian Jones in the Rolling Stones – *The Turning Point* places Mayall in an intimate acoustic setting and he clearly relishes every moment. Liberated from the straitjacket of the electric guitar-led Chicago blues band style, he draws on jazz and folk with help from acoustic guitarist Jon Mark – best known for working with Marianne Faithfull – bassist Steve Thompson and saxist/flautist Johnny Almond. Mayall, of course, plays his customary blues harp and contributes slide. He also wrote or co-wrote the seven-song set, and produced and designed the album cover artwork. Eddie Kramer, who'd previously worked with Hendrix and concurrently Led Zeppelin, engineered it. *Room To Move,* a frenetic harmonica wailing rave-up is the stand out, but everything is ace here from the poignant *I'm Gonna Fight For You JB,* a tribute to JB Lenoir who died in 1967, to the rousing *Don't Waste My Time*. Unsurprisingly, Mayall still revisits songs from the album in his live shows today.

ALICE CLARK

Brit icon delivers first class Mayall.

GETTY x10, REX

19

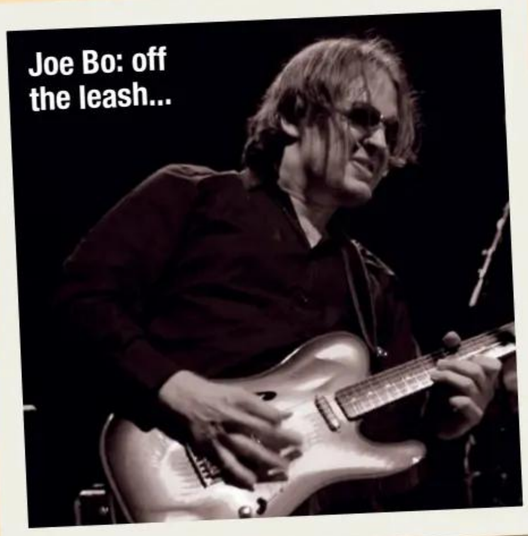


JOE BONAMASSA
A New Day Yesterday Live
2002

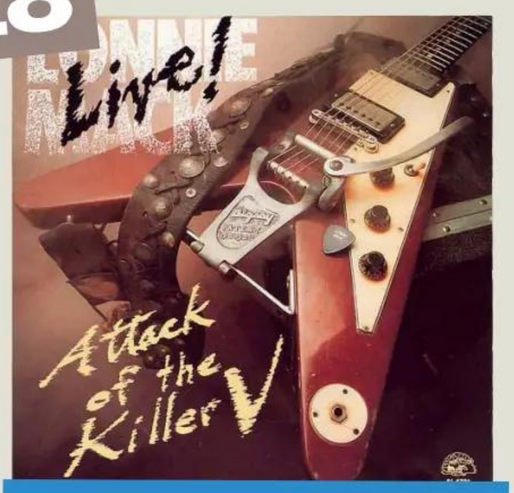
Unsurprisingly given his penchant for life on the road and seemingly compelling urge for releasing new records, Joe Bonamassa has put out a whopping 11 live albums (including the four *Tour De Force* albums released earlier this year) to date. This 2002 effort was the first of those 11, and it's yet to be topped. Recorded as Bonamassa toured his debut record back in late 2001, *A New Day Yesterday Live* is a 70-minute set which reminds us of the raw, rough around the edges but absolutely electrifying artist that he was back in his early days.

Bonamassa originals like *I Know Where I Belong, Miss You, Hate You* and *Colour And Shape* nestle neatly alongside covers of Free's *Walk In My Shadow* and *Cradle Rock* by Rory Gallagher, among several more as this stripped-back three-piece band (completed by bassist Eric Czar and drummer Kenny Kramme) deliver in spades. The mighty groove of *Steppin' Out/Rice Pudding* and Joe's soulful soloing on the Jethro Tull track from which the record takes its name are joys to behold. He may have developed into a more polished all-round musician since teaming up with producer Kevin Shirley, but this is Bonamassa off the leash and at his very best.

RICH CHAMBERLAIN


Joe Bo: off the leash...

18



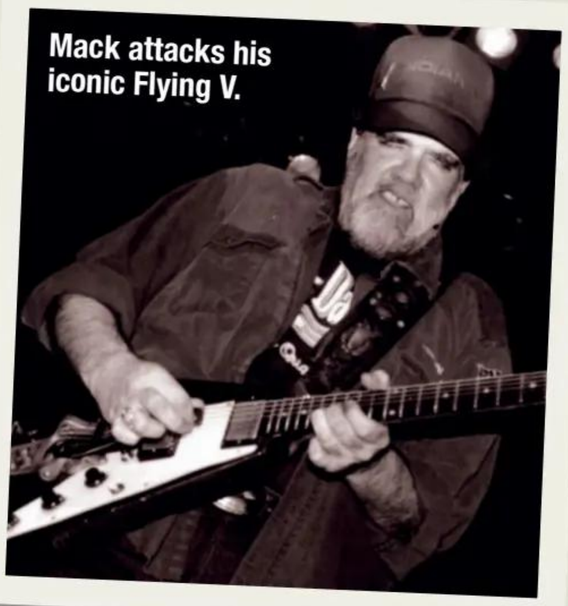
LONNIE MACK
Attack Of The Killer V
1990

Even if you'd actually heard of it, the suburb of Berwyn, Illinois, might not be the first place you would expect to cut a landmark live album, but it nonetheless proved to be fertile ground for Lonnie Mack when he took to the stage there in December 1989 to produce this throbbing live set for Bruce Iglauer's mighty Alligator label.

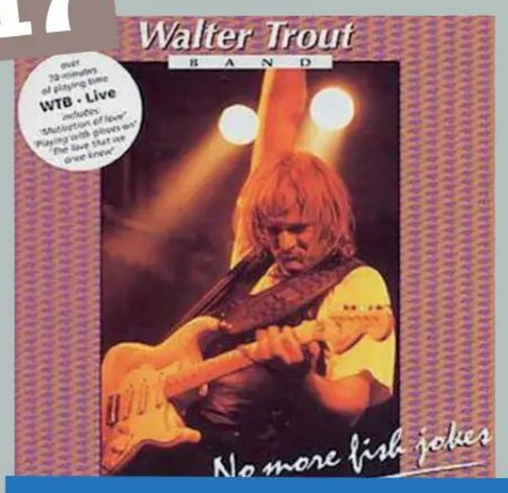
Although he was something of a veteran by the time he recorded this, his first and so-far only live album, Mack was at the top of his game, and held nothing back in front of his very loud and very drunk audience who sing along, happily and unprompted, to the set list; their contribution to *Natural Disaster* being particularly vocal.

Backed by Michael Freeman on bass, Dumpy Rice on piano and Maxwell Schauf on drums, Mack switches from roadhouse rockers to blue-eyed soul in the blink of an eye. This is the man who inspired everyone from Stevie Ray Vaughan to Keith Richards and when you hear him tear it up on the closer, *Cincinnati Jail*, it's not hard to see why. *Attack of the Killer V* proved to be his last full release. Well, if you're going to go out, go out in style – and Mack went out on a high with this one.

JAMIE HAILSTONE


Mack attacks his iconic Flying V.

17



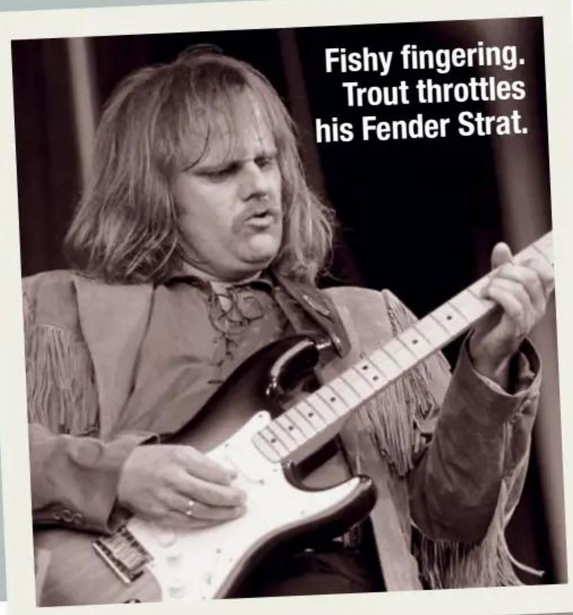
WALTER TROUT
No More Fish Jokes ***1992***

"I feel like rocking, how about you?" screams Walter Trout as he rips into *False Alarm*, the third track on this 1992 magnum opus, re-released on vinyl earlier this year to celebrate his 25th year as a solo artist. Ok, as battle cries go it's not quite up there with *"Yippee ki-yay"* but it sums up the Trout live experience perfectly.

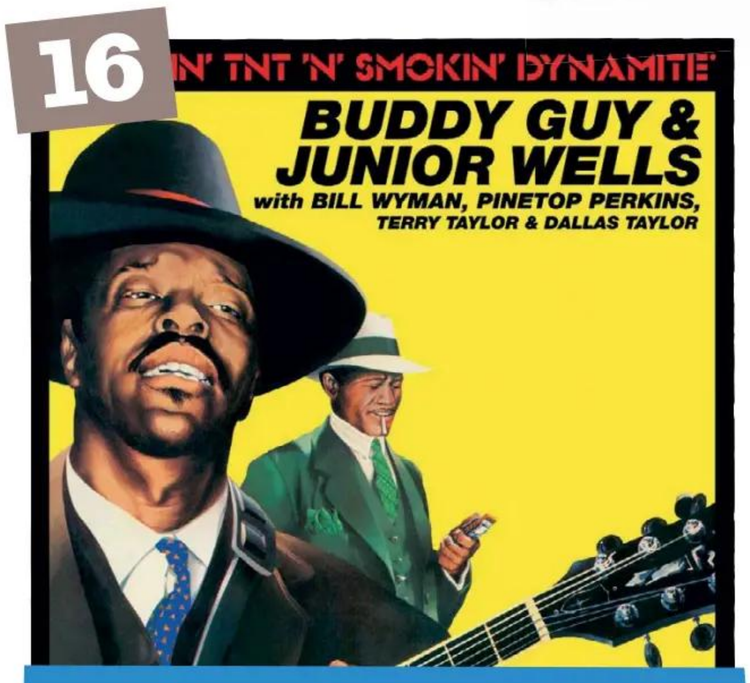
The bulk of the 12-track album was cut live at the Skanderborg Festival in Denmark on August 10, 1991, with three songs culled from a separate show at the De Hanehof in the Netherlands the following year. To paraphrase the late Eric Morecambe, you really can't see the join between the two shows, as Trout and his band breathe new life into Robert Johnson's *Dust My Broom* and Dylan's *Girl From The North County*, as well as Trout originals, such as *Life In The Jungle*.

The fiery interplay between Trout and his original bassist and late friend, Jimmy Trapp, keyboard player, Danny "Mongo" Abrams and drummers Frank Continola and Bernie Pershey (the latter was behind the drums for the De Hanehof show), prove that despite the rather naff title, *No More Fish Jokes* is no laughing matter. It's Trout at his very best. Off the scale, you might say...

JAMIE HAILSTONE


Fishy fingering. Trout throttles his Fender Strat.

16

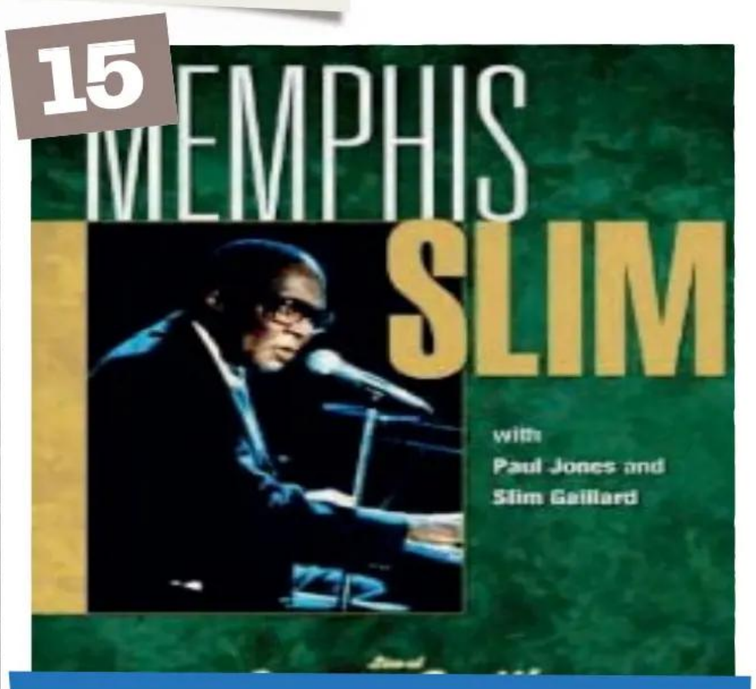


BUDDY GUY
Drinkin' TNT 'N' Smokin' Dynamite
1988

Despite his ability to burn up stages with the absolute best of 'em, Buddy Guy is a consummate backup man who could subsume his ego when it came time to let someone else shine. Junior Wells? Not so much. Here be proof. Cut at the '74 Montreux Festival with an all-star band assembled by Bill Wyman and featuring Pinetop Perkins, the guy with the harp struts ands blusters his way through his hits and standards nicely enough, but it's Buddy who would've blown the roof off the joint with the incendiary *Ten Years Ago* and *When You See The Tears From* My *eyes*. Awesome. Epic. This is blues you can't lose and the shit that cain't be beat.

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY

15



MEMPHIS SLIM
Live At Ronnie Scott's
1990

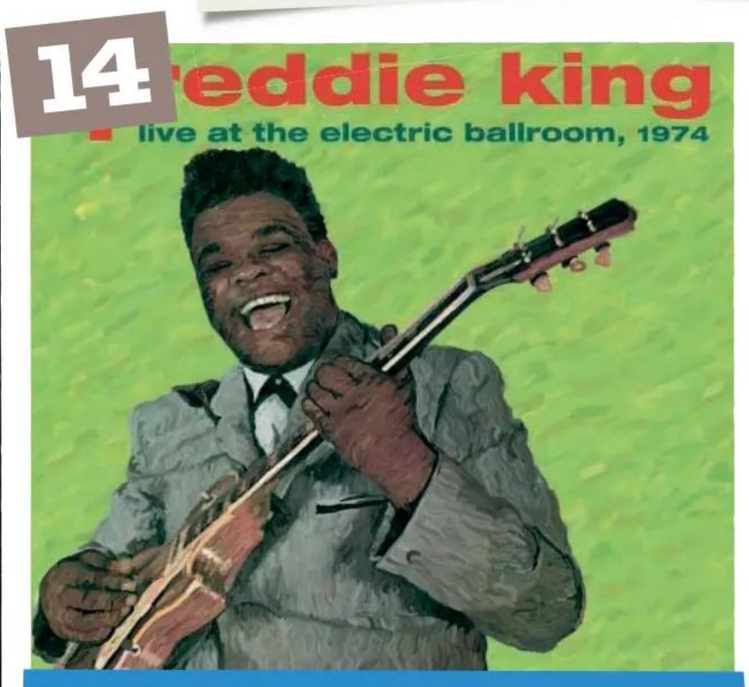
Audiences at Ronnie Scott's in London have grown accustomed to seeing living legends up close and personal but this '86 concert was still a rare chance to see a master craftsman at work.

Joined on stage by a crack band, including Paul Jones on harmonica and Danny Adler on guitar, and with a brief appearance by fellow pianist Slim Gaillard and the I Dance Jazz group (the clue is in the name), the mood is one of hushed reverence, as Slim performs classics like *400 Years*, *Stepping Out* and *Please Send Me To Love*.

At the end, as Slim shuffles into the audience, the look on their faces says it all – Ronnie Scott's has just witnessed something truly special.

JAMIE HAILSTONE

14



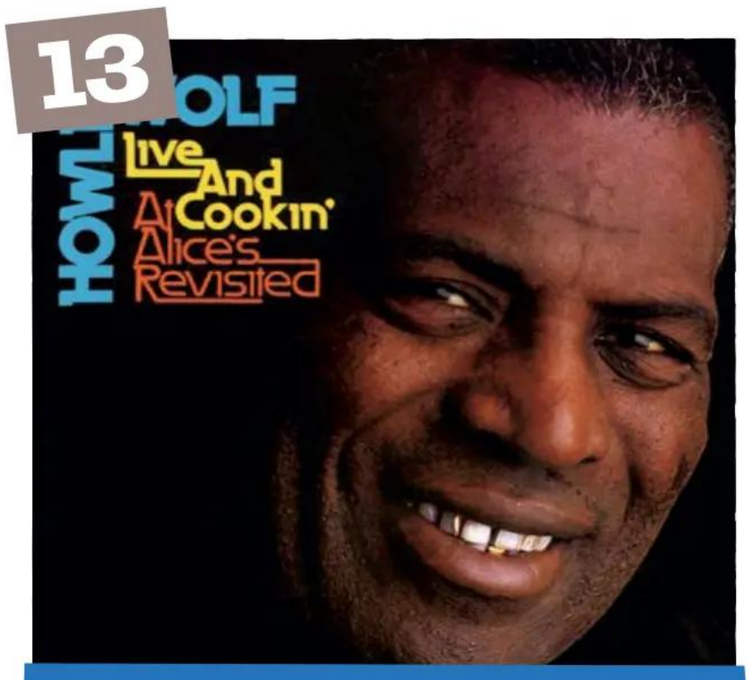
FREDDIE KING
Live At The Electric Ballroom
1974

Recorded two years before his death in 1976, *Live At The Electric Ballroom* actually opens with King playing an acoustic session for a Dallas radio station, with masterful renditions of *That's All Right* and *Dust My Broom*.

The live cuts from The Electric Ballroom in Atlanta find Freddie cooking with gas right from the start with a belting version of *Big Leg Woman*. He boogies hard on *Key To The Highway*, with superb backing from Alvin Hemphill on organ; and there's a funky cut of *Let The Good Times Roll* and a slow burn through *Ain't Nobody's Business*. The concert wraps up with a run through *Hide Away Medley* that sizzles like a Texas T-bone.

DAVID WEST

13



HOWLIN' WOLF

Live And Cookin' (At Alice's Revisited)

1972

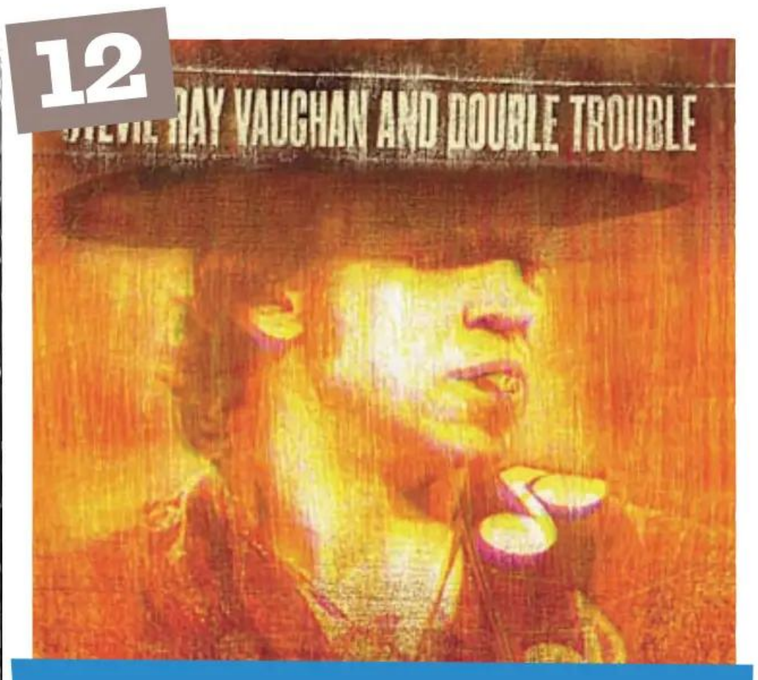
Howlin' Wolf was still capable of bringing down the house in the latter stages of his career, as this 1972 performance shows.

It takes a while for the man to build up steam but when he hits his stride on tracks like *I Had A Dream* and *Call Me The Wolf*, the results are truly electrifying. For a man who was not in the best of health, he could still wail with the best of them – not least on eight-minute epic *The Big House*.

The band, including Hubert Sumlin on guitar, lock into the groove from the get-go, but, at times, are let down by a dodgy sound mix. But what it lacks in audio precision, *Live and Cookin'* more than makes up for with sheer blues mojo.

JAMIE HAILSTONE

12



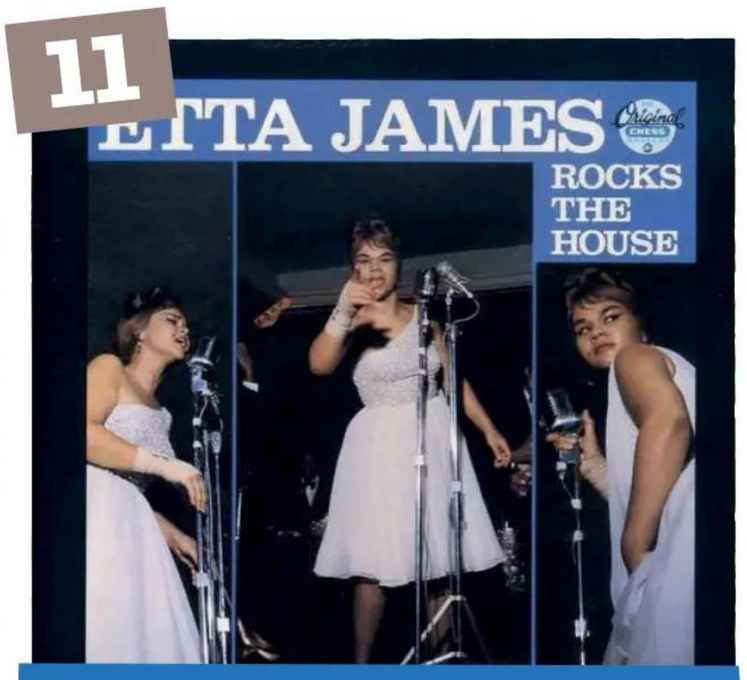
STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN AND DOUBLE TROUBLE

Live at Montreux 82/85 *2001*

Not just one of the greatest live albums, this two-concert set is also one of the most controversial. Well, the first half is, anyway. The '82 appearance of SRV and Double Trouble (drummer Chris Layton and bassist Tommy Shannon), a masterclass in groove, musicianship and style, was greeted with boos by the festival's audience. The juxtaposition of such a superb show with a jeering audience makes for captivating listening. When Stevie and Co returned in '85 as headliners there were no such sniffs of discontent. They delivered another flawless set, this time getting the appreciation and respect they deserved.

RICH CHAMBERLAIN

11



ETTA JAMES

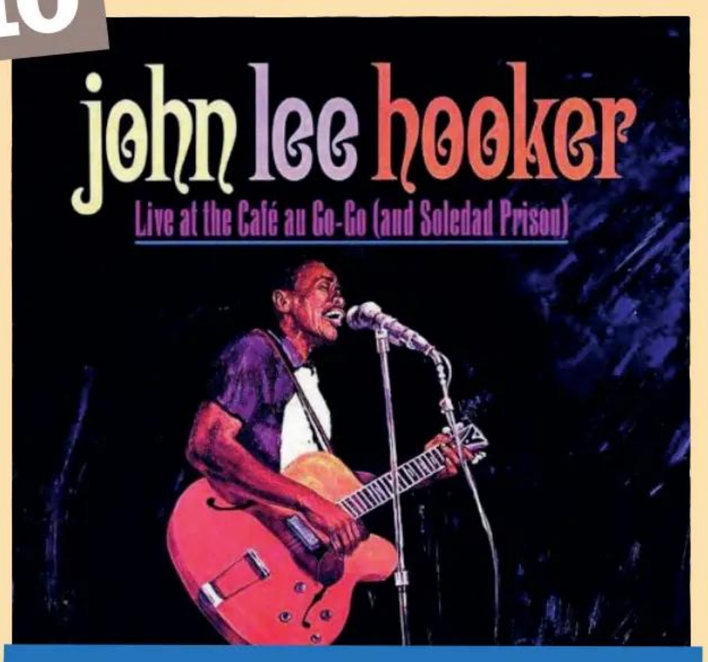
Rocks The House

1964

A storming rival to James Brown's *Live At The Apollo*, *Rocks The House* captures Etta's raucous set taken from two nights at Nashville's New Era Club in September 1963 with a swinging band: tenor saxist Gavrell Cooper, organist Vonzell Cooper, bassist Marion Wright, guitarist David Walker, drummers Freeman Brown and Richard Waters. As the tapes roll, Etta launches into *Something's Got A Hold On Me*, and the place erupts. The remainder mixes Chess hits like *Seven Day Fool* with covers like Ray Charles' *What'd I Say*. Barrett Strong's *Money (That's What I Want)* and Jessie Hill's *Ooh Poo Pah Doo*, driven by a Baptist-like fervour, shake the very foundations.

ALICE CLARK

10



JOHN LEE HOOKER

Live At The Café Au Go-Go

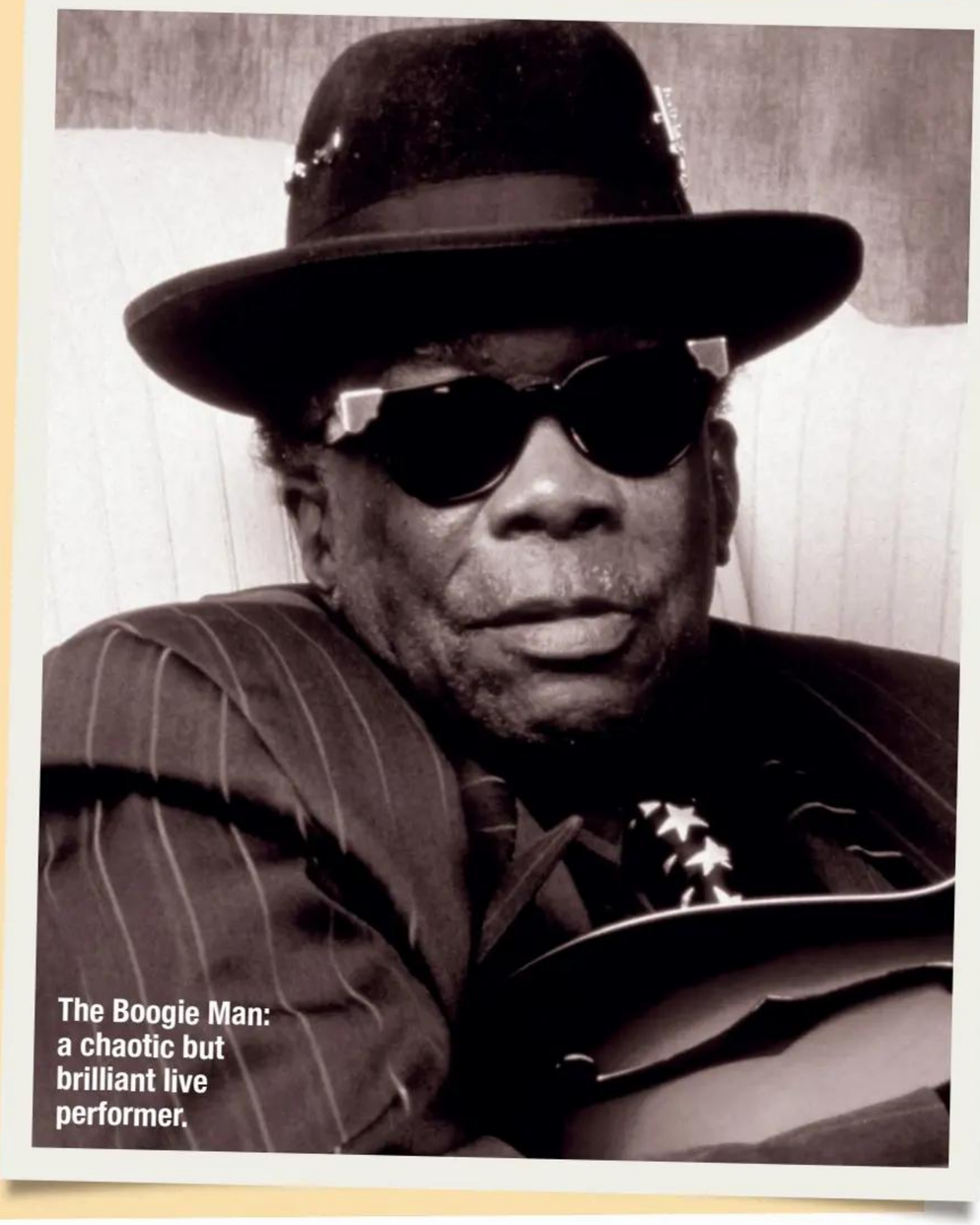
1967

The Boogie Man spent much of the later 60s working harder and harder to light his fire under progressively soggier backup ensembles, but here he's heard with one of the best and most sympathetic bands of his extraordinary career. Unfortunately, it wasn't his own band, but Muddy Waters's, even including Otis Spann on pianner and the Big Mud himself on the electric guitar.

The programme included *One Bourbon One Scotch One Beer*, *Jesse James* and *Never Get Out Of These Blues Alive*, and the result was the kind of richly-textured swamp-deep blues which has you wondering how things would've gone if the notoriously introvert lone-cat Hooker had put as much effort and energy into maintaining a first-class regular band as Muddy did.

It's not exactly an unflawed performance: the opening of *Jesse James* finds drummer Francis Clay expecting a different song and crashing in with a VERY different beat, *One Bourbon One Scotch One Beer* is even more chaotic than the original Chess studio cut and there are some extremely sour tuning discrepancies between the four guitarists (Sammy Lawhorn and Luther Johnson alongside Muddy and John Lee), with Hooker himself the prime culprit. Nevertheless, the degree of emotional rapport between Hooker and the band – particularly the astonishing Spann, who's right at the top of his game throughout – is nothing short of extraordinary. As is Hooker himself ('Singing for people who feel the way I do') and premiering a song he'd sing for the rest of his life, *Never Get Out Of These Blues Alive*. The title is a riff on a *Never Get Out Of This World Alive*; a '52 Hank Williams number that ironically snagged number 1 shortly after his death: Hooker's alteration of 'this world' to 'these blues' tells what you need to know about the differences between both men, and the similarities.

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY



The Boogie Man: a chaotic but brilliant live performer.

GETTY X3

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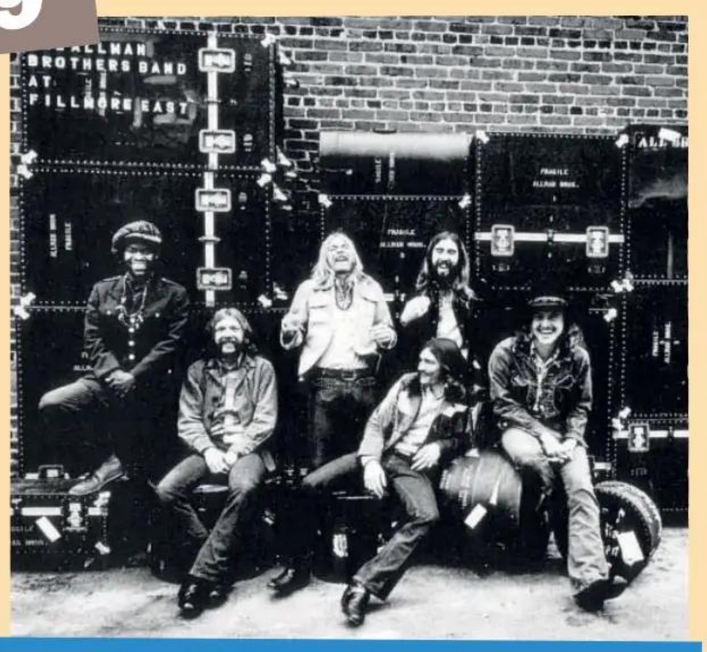


THE ALLMAN BROTHERS
At Fillmore East *1971*

Phun Phact: during the three-night stand in March 1971 at Bill Graham's Fillmore East in New York which produced the immortal album, which still stands as their finest recorded hour, The Allman Brothers Band were actually opening for Johnny Winter. However, such was the power of their performances that by the third night they were headlining. This was the classic line-up of the band – Duane Allman and Richard 'don't-call-me-Dickey' Betts (guitars), Gregg Allman (vocals, organ), Berry Oakley (bass), Jai Johnny Johanson and Butch Trucks (drums and percussion) – and the album came about because they were dissatisfied with their two studio albums, feeling the essence of what they did was what happened on a stage before an audience. Thus it was that those Fillmore shows were recorded under the supervision of master producer/engineer Tom Dowd and... guess what? They were right.

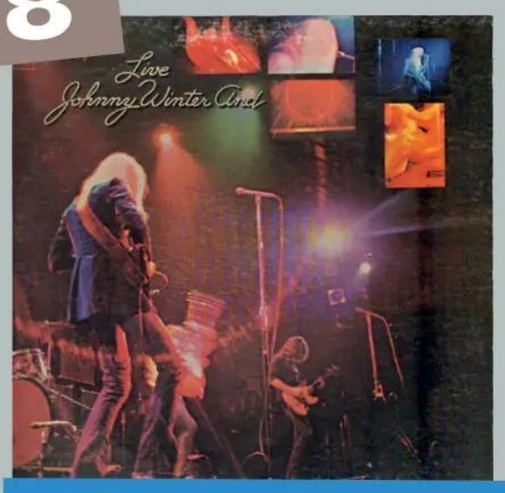
The original seven-song vinyl double (which subsequently grew into a double CD with the addition of material from a June 27 gig recorded on the Fillmore's closing night, and has now become a six-CD monster with all shows complete) presented the sextet playing as a single mind and soul with a dozen hands and feet, performing blues, jazz, soul, rock and country as a single music. However, the blues was the platform on which all else stood: some of their soaringest jazz flights took off from launch-pads like Blind Willie McTell's *Statesboro Blues* (a la Taj Mahal), T-Bone Walker's *Stormy Monday* (a la Bobby Bland) and Elmore James's *Done Somebody Wrong*.

If these shows hadn't been recorded, only those who'd actually caught Les Brers in full flight would have had even the foggiest notion of what the original line-up actually sounded like: Duane died in a motorcycle accident later that year, as did Berry Oakley exactly a year later.

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY

At their best at Fillmore East.

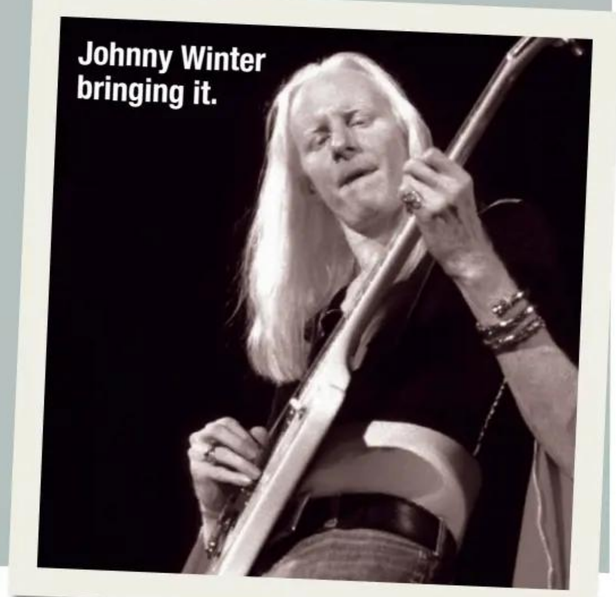
8



JOHNNY WINTER
Live Johnny Winter And...
1971

Johnny Winter's brief 'And' team-up with the former McCoys (singer/guitarist Rick Derringer, bassist Randy Jo Hobbs and drummer Randy Z) first yielded a studio album of earthy Southern takes on post-Hendrix psychedelic blues-rock and then [with Bobby Caldwell replacing Randy Z] this knock-down, metal-blues live throwdown in which songs and devices borrowed from B.B. King, John Lee Hooker, Chuck Berry and the Stones are joyfully beaten to within an inch of their lives. Recorded in Florida and New York during the autumn of 1970, it's blisteringly raucous, bringing vitality to grizzled garage-band standards like *Jumpin' Jack Flash* and *Johnny B Goode*, though Derringer's showcase '50s medley is a waste of everybody's time, not least Derringer's. It's Winter's hotwired blues epics which truly bring it: Sonny Boy's *Good Morning Little School Girl*, all pounding drums and entwined call-and-response guitars, B.B.'s slow blues *It's My Own Fault* and Winter's cranked Hookeresque *Mean Town Blues* are where this album fo' sho' do the do.

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY


Johnny Winter bringing it.

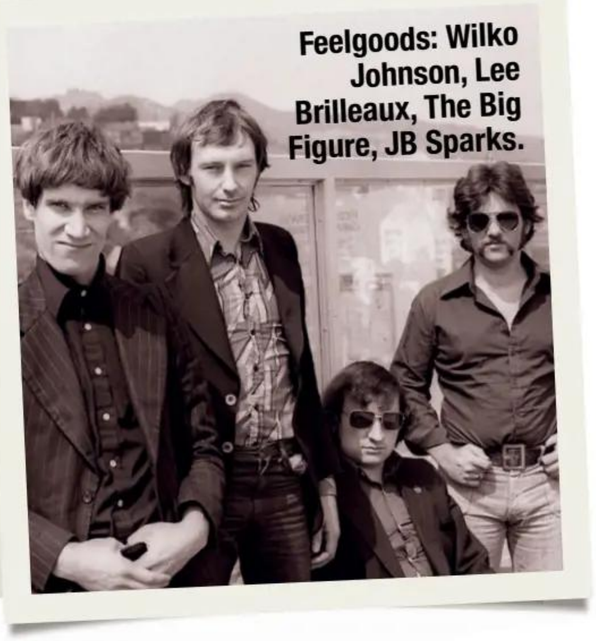
7

DR FEELGOOD
Stupidity
1976

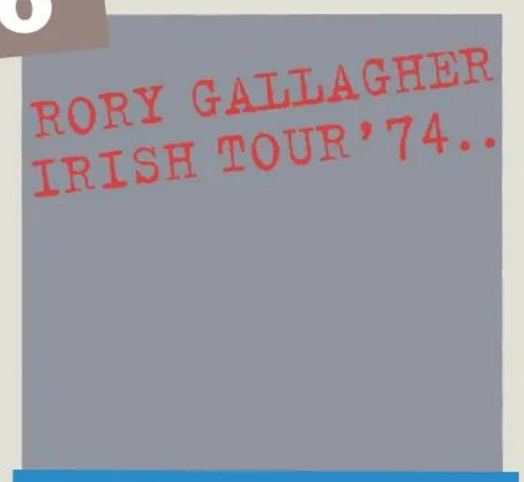
Some live albums would never have existed if the artists had listened to the label. Atlantic didn't want to record the Allman Brothers live; King Records didn't want to cut James Brown at the Apollo and United Artists couldn't see why Dr Feelgood should be taped in front of a crowd when their two existing albums had already been so barebonesy live-in-the-studio. Still, UA indulged the Feelgoods and, much to everybody's surprise (including the Feelgoods) were rewarded with their first (and only) number 1 album. There it was, complete with iconic cover image: two stroppy psychotic bastards at the front and two stocky surly bastards at the back. Six of its 15 tracks were written by Wilko Johnson and all appeared on the earlier records (Wilk was always better on quality than quantity); and the rest was Sonny Boy Williamson, Solomon Burke, Chuck'n'Bo, Rufus Thomas and Leiber & Stoller. Clatter, clang, chop chop chop, do WHAT, John?

British rhythm and blues would never be the same again, with key elements of UK punk delivered by caesarian as a bonus. There was indeed a riot goin' on.

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY


Feelgoods: Wilko Johnson, Lee Brilleaux, The Big Figure, JB Sparks.

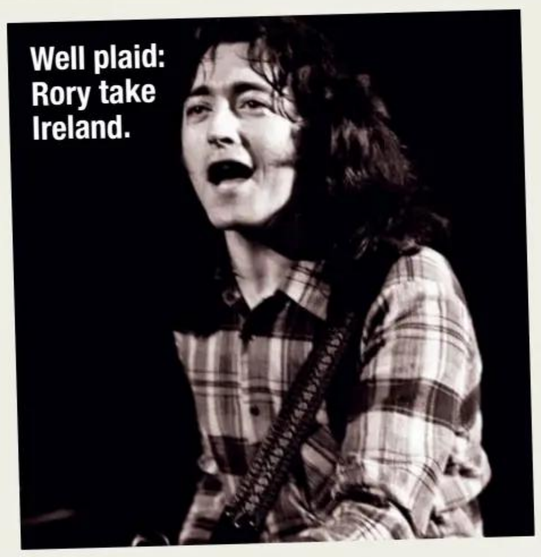
6



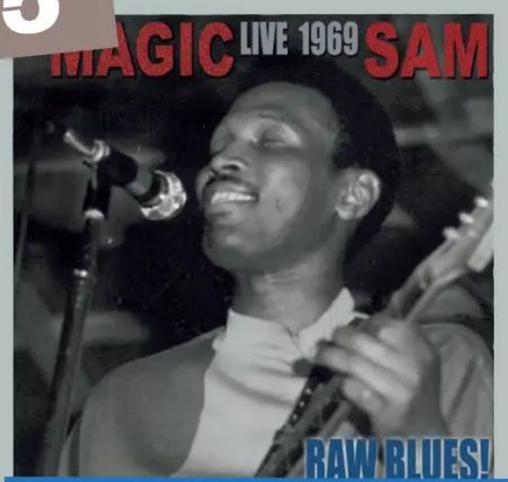
RORY GALLAGHER
Irish Tour '74 *1974*

Recorded across three shows – at Belfast Ulster Hall, Dublin Carlton Cinema and Cork City Hall– on Gallagher's (as the title suggests) 1974 Irish tour, this is the epitome of a live album capturing an artist's very essence in a way that a studio recording never could. This album is pure adrenaline, it's bottled lightning and it depicts the sensational combination of reckless abandon and sublime skill that Rory played with night after night. Unapologetically raw, *Irish Tour '74* features a mix of Gallagher originals and classic covers. Opener *Cradle Rock* sounds incredible with Gallagher's guitar smashing it's way out of the speakers, while Muddy Waters' *I Wonder Who* starts with Rory's beautifully rough vocal and quickly turns into expertly executed rendition thanks to wave upon wave of stunning soloing. It's not just the playing that makes this a bonafide must-own live album: its greatest appeal is the spine-tingling sense of a wedge-thick atmosphere that is present all the way through. Crowd clap-alongs and a frenetically fervent approval to Gallagher's every move up and down the neck of his iconic Strat only add to the feeling that this was one hell of a tour, and fittingly, this is one hell of an album.

RICH CHAMBERLAIN


Well plaid: Rory take Ireland.

5



MAGIC SAM
Raw Blues 1969
2013

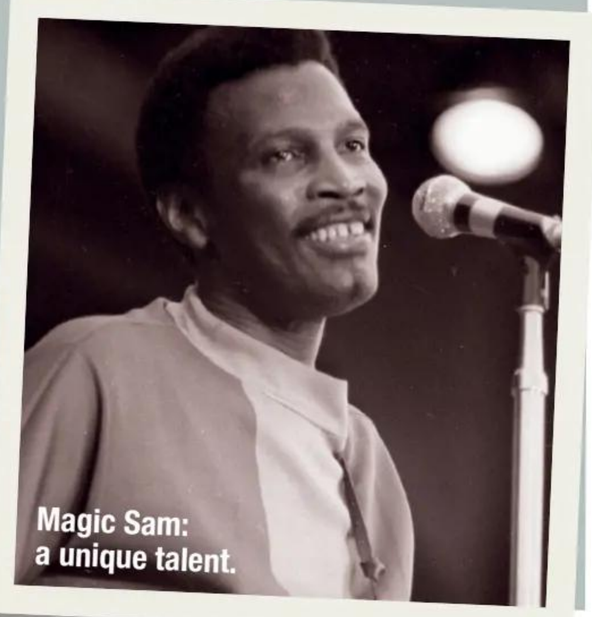
If he'd only cut his two peerless studio records ('67's *West Side Soul*, '68's *Black Magic*), Samuel "Magic Sam" Gene Maghett would have done more than enough to assure a blues sainthood.

Luckily, Magic Sam's ghost haunts a wealth of tape cut at various live shows in the 60s. The recent Delmark release *Live At The Avant Garde June 22, 1968* is well worth dipping into your savings for... but only after you've snagged *Raw Blues 1969*.

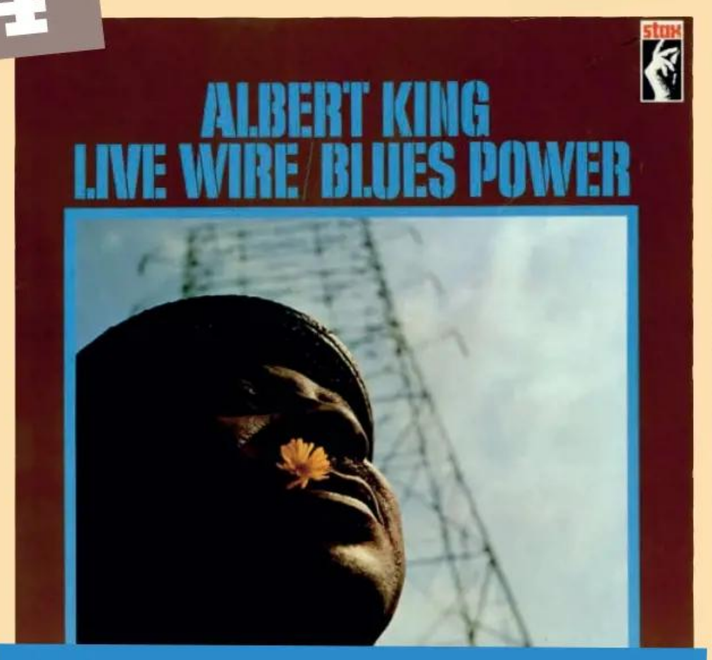
The recording quality isn't hi-fi by any means but real blues fans will put up with the layer of dust on treasures like the opener, a funky as hell romp through Freddie King's *San-Ho-Zay*, and the sucker punch of Sam's '57 debut *All Of Your Love*. The latter track is Exhibit A for all that was great about the man; the icy reverberated guitar licks, that soaring falsetto voice. *Sweet Home Chicago* offers more compelling evidence for the defence.

Who knows where Sam would have gone had he not checked out for good from a heart attack at the age of 32. His was a unique talent. What we do know is that blues history is infinitely richer from the work he left behind. *Raw Blues 1969* is a great place for Magic Sam virgins to get deflowered.

ED MITCHELL


Magic Sam: a unique talent.

4



ALBERT KING
Live Wire/Blues Power
1968

Recorded at San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium (aka Fillmore West) during a two-night stand in June 1968 when he shared the bill with Jimi Hendrix and John Mayall, this was Albert's meet-the-hippies triumph, complete with a cover shot of the great man with a flower in his mouth looking for all the world like Ferdinand the Bull. Abstaining from revisiting Albert's core repertoire or recycling his greatest hits, it instead prioritised powerhouse instrumentals, fast and slow; all interspersed with cosy homilies on the expressive and curative powers of the blues. King delivered a disgracefully hammy and manipulative performance which is nevertheless outrageously enjoyable: the album depicts a masterly performer at the absolute height of his powers, joyfully aided and abetted by a band – rhythm guitarist Willie James Exon, organist James Washington, bassist Roosevelt Pointer, drummer Theotis Morgan – and audience ready, willing and able to go the distance with him. All over this album, and especially on the ten-minute-plus title track, the Velvet Bulldozer demonstrates his unparalleled mastery of tone, phrasing and dynamics: his ability to build remorselessly to a raging climax and then cut everything back to barely a whisper before repeating the same stunt two or three times, each time with greater and greater impact, within the space of a single song. (Is there anything sexual implied in this musical metaphor? Discuss, writing on only one side of the paper.) The remaining tracks recorded over those two nights (by MGs drummer Al Jackson, who also presided over Albert's Stax studio sessions) were later (MUCH later) released as a pair of albums entitled *Wednesday Night (and Thursday Night) In San Francisco*, and it's there you'll find Albert's live renditions of his core repertoire, done to an absolute turn despite the absence of a horn section. Must've been an amazing coupla nights...

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY

Albert King: hammy, manipulative and highly enjoyable.

GETTY x6

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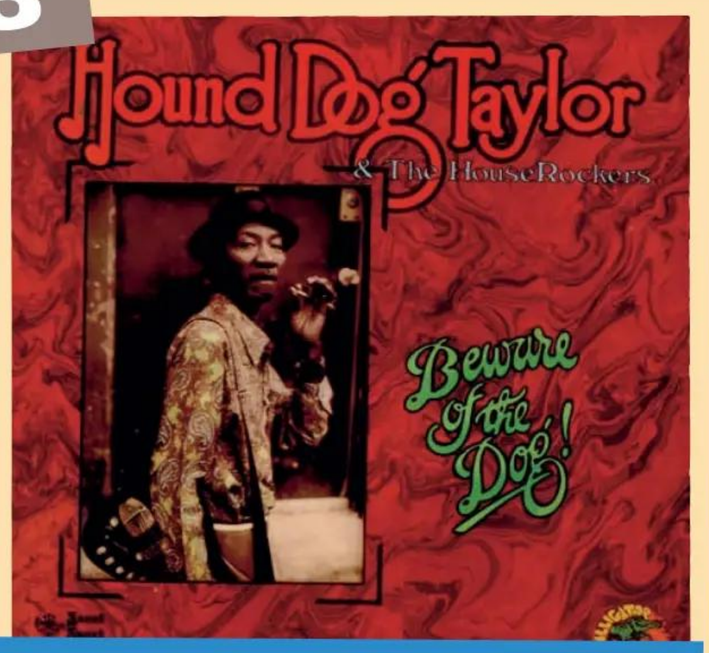


HOUND DOG TAYLOR
Beware Of The Dog!
1976

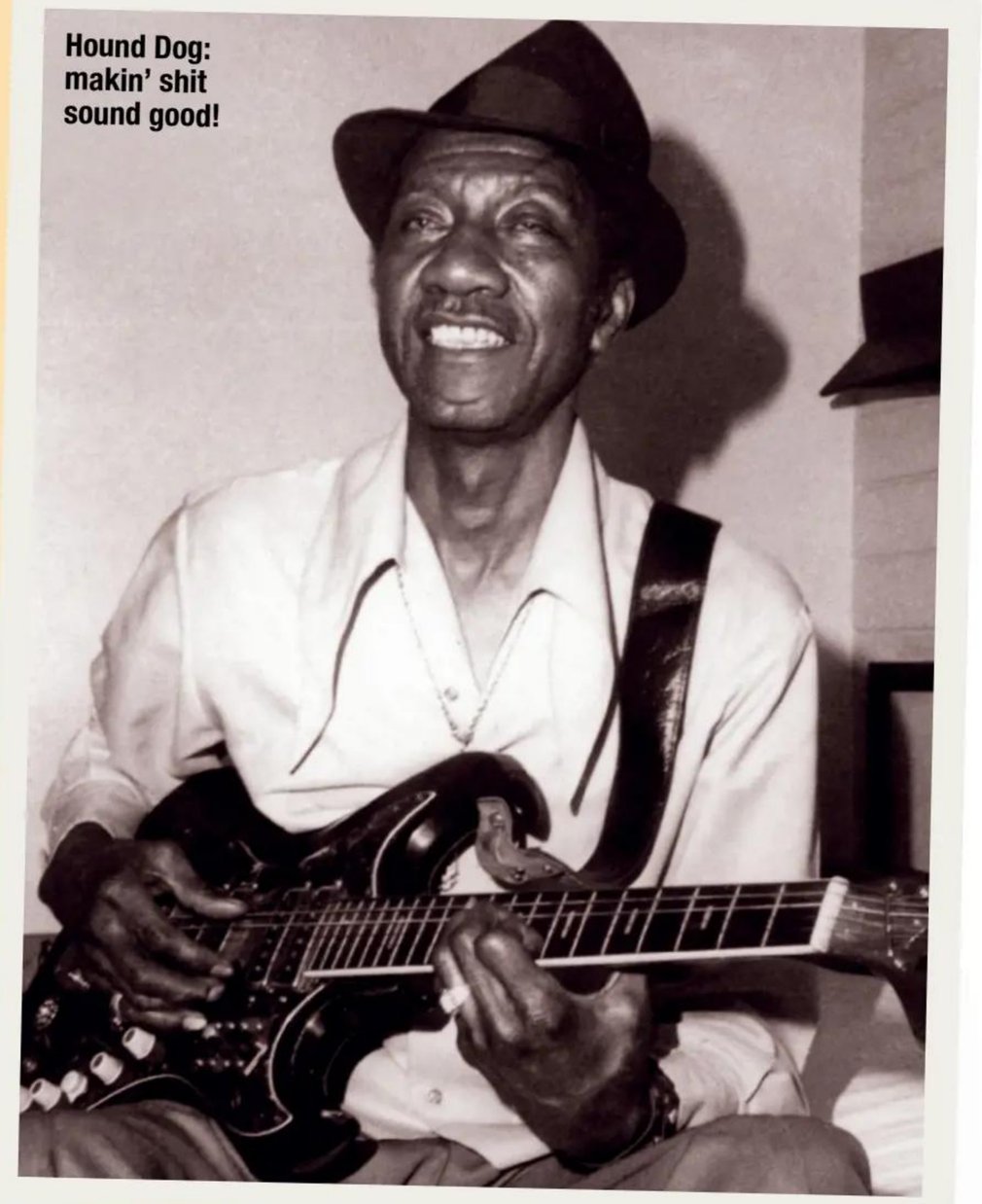
Rough? Raw? Raw-kus? Authentic? Downhome? Funky? By comparison, everything else on this list sounds like ABBA. Theodore Roosevelt 'Hound Dog' Taylor (1915-1975) was the founding artist of Alligator Records: indeed, Bruce Iglauer founded the legendary Chicago indie in 1971 specifically to record Hound Dog after hearing him in a South Side tavern playing jam-hot jook-joint slide exactly the way it might have been heard in his native Natchez, Mississippi, twenty or more years earlier. He'd obviously accepted Elmore James as his personal saviour: his bass-less line-up – his backing band, The HouseRockers, simply consisted of second guitarist Brewer Phillips and drummer Ted Harvey – were the spiritual ancestors of the likes of Jon Spencer's Blues Explosion, The White Stripes and The Black Keys, and not-so-distant cousins of the North Mississippi school of R.L. Burnside and Junior Kimbrough.

Hound Dog was a character, no mistake: extra fingers, toes and nipples ran in his family, and he had six fingers on each hand. One night he overdid the Canadian Club and decided to hack off the extra digits with a razor, but it hurt so much that he only managed to amputate one.

This music here is footstomping party-time fare (it should come as no surprise that head Destroyer George Thorogood was and remains a massive Hound Dog fan) which he ended up taking to colleges, festivals and international tours after the modest but potent success of his first two albums enabled him and his HouseRockers to quit their day-jobs and play their dirty messaround for a living.

Dying of cancer in 1975 at the age of 59, Hound Dog didn't live to see the release of *Beware Of the Dog!*, easily his finest album, but it bears out his puckish self-written epitaph, 'He couldn't play shit, but he sure made it sound good!'

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY


Hound Dog: makin' shit sound good!

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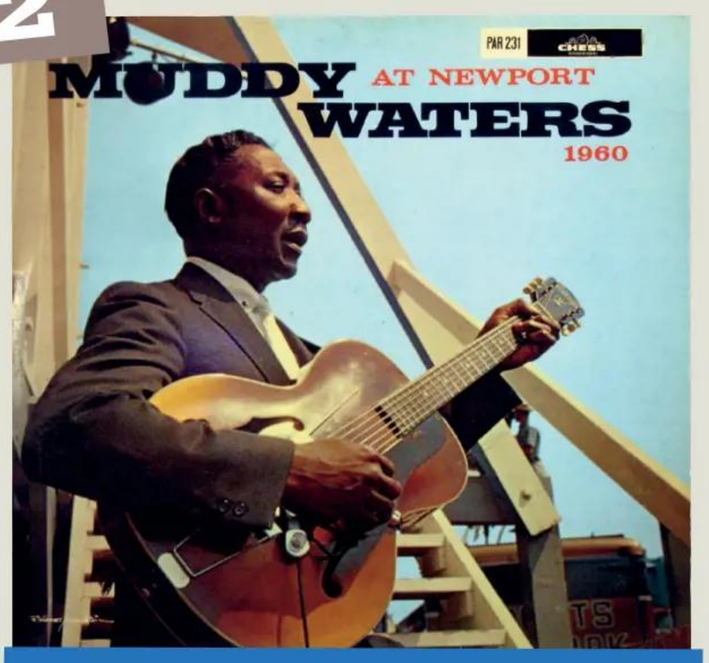


MUDDY WATERS
At Newport 1960
1960

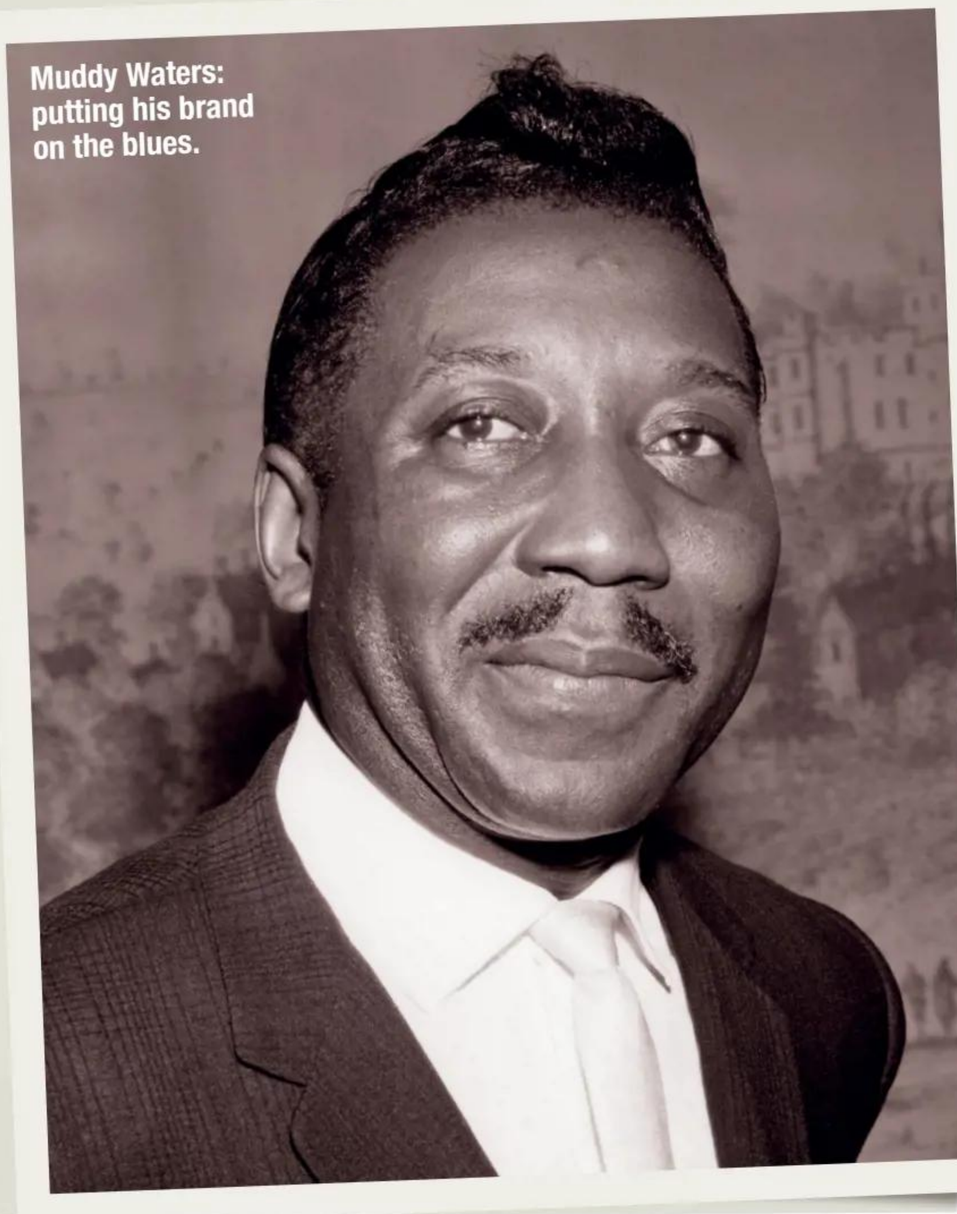
It was just one of those fortunate accidents: waiting to take the stage on a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon at the Newport Jazz Festival for what would turn out (in aftermath of a 'riot') to be that year's final session, Muddy Waters was approached by a photographer ready to snap the cover shot for the live album he was just about to record. Said photog requested that Muddy pose with his guitar, but the Big Mud's gleaming Fender Telecaster was out of reach, already up on the stage. The nearest guitar was a battered old archtop acoustic with a pickup attached, belonging to John Lee Hooker, so Muddy posed with that instead. Result: an iconic image perfectly suited to Muddy's first major outreach to the affluent bourgeois white audience which would end up sustaining him for the remainder of his career.

Muddy had been booked at the behest of Atlantic Records' Nesuhi Ertegun, who called Muddy 'my favourite singer' and he brought along his then-current band featuring James Cotton on harp, the sublime Otis Spann on piano and Pat Hare on guitar (Hare once recorded a single called *I'm Going To Murder My Baby*; some years later he did exactly that and died of cancer in jail).

The kind of energy which would shake the rafters of any Chicago bar seems slightly dissipated in the open air, which is probably just as well as otherwise it might've scared the hell outta the white folks.

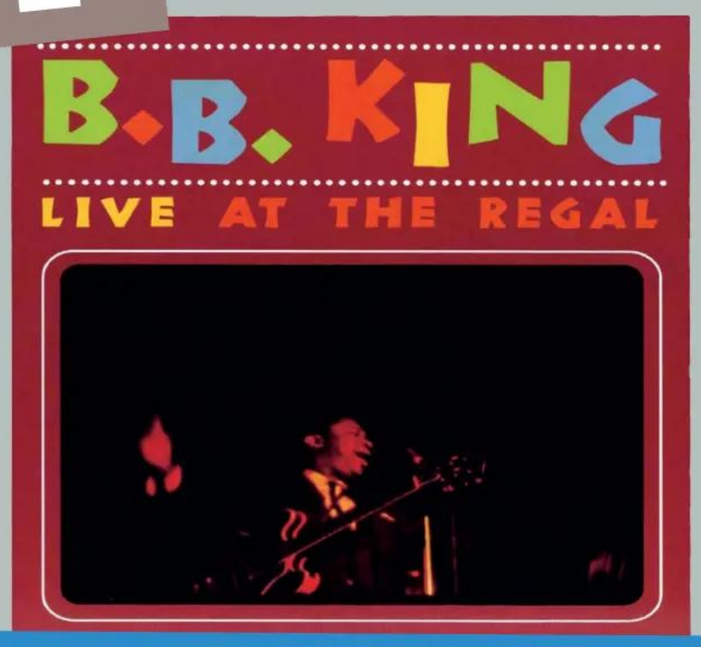
Muddy and his posse rock the likes of *Hoochie Coochie Man, Baby Please Don't Go, I Got My Brand On You, Soon Forgotten,* Big Bill Broonzy's *I Feel So Good* and *Got My Mojo Workin'* (which goes down so well they have to play it twice) hard enough that it must've been apparent, even there and then, that a new epoch in the history of the blues was about to begin.

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY


Muddy Waters: putting his brand on the blues.

Smokin'! B.B. is our king of live blues albums.

1



B.B. KING
Live At The Regal
1965

In a way, it's almost too easy to take *Live At The Regal* for granted. It's one of those iconic masterpieces – like *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *Exile On Main Street*, *Blonde On Blonde* or *Never Mind The Bollocks* in the rock sphere – which are, these days, almost more admired than they're listened to. There are other B.B. live albums: some are almost as good and a couple (*Blues Is King* and *Live At Cook County Jail*) may – gasp! – even be better.

Nevertheless, *Live At The Regal* was the first one, and it was the game-changer: both for B.B. and for regiments of subsequent arrivals in the blues guitar arena: players from Eric Clapton to Rolling Stone Mick Taylor to Joe Bonamassa have attested to the album's power and influence.

Cut at Chicago's Regal Theatre on November 21, 1964, as part of a two-shows-a-night one-week residency, it showcased not only yer man's formidable vocal and instrumental talents, already familiar to thousands of fans from his studio recordings, but his gifts as a performer: the way he paced his set, talked to the audience and charmingly but ruthlessly manipulated the energy in the room on the night.

As your friend and ours Walter Trout puts it, speaking for the multitudes, "It's my favourite live blues album. It was actually my father's copy, so I heard it from an early age. There are some gigs that are magical, and they managed to capture a magical B.B. King show that night. It makes the hair on your arms stand on end, y'know? Some of the guitar playing on there is so magnificently beautiful. And it's the tightness of his band. It's just a stunning piece of work, man. There's some incredible blues on there. I think it was 1965, and he was at his peak."

B.B. himself never quite got what all the fuss was about. For him, it was just another show out of hundreds which just happened to get recorded: better than some, not as good as others. In his autobiography, he tells us, "When the record came out... the critics went a little wild. Called it my best ever. A bunch of writers talked like they were rediscovering me. But I didn't know I had disappeared... I thought I'd been out there night after night, year after year. Some of the writers described *Live At The Regal* like I was playing way over my head. Well, I ain't one to argue with praise. I like and welcome praise whenever it comes my way... but I also know I got to keep my head about me. Even though [it] was cool, I've probably played hundreds of better concerts."

And similar ones, too. "By then, my repertoire was pretty set. I'd open with *Every Day I Have The Blues*, slide into *Sweet Little Angel*, move to *It's My Own Fault* and strike back with *How Blue Can You Get*." In other words, pretty much the same set he performed, with his classy, brassy, swing-and-jump-derived bands, for the next few decades.

Listening to it again now, it's startling how much of the DNA of that show (and the hundreds like it, of course) has soaked into the fabric of blues guitar. We've heard those licks so often – not only from B himself, but from so many players who cut their teeth on this album – that it's almost a shock to realise that when he played this stuff, it was NEW.

Later, of course, he reached out to the Fillmore hippies and, with *The Thrill Is Gone*, finally connected with that Big White Mainstream Pop Audience In The Sky.

On *Blues Is King*, cut a couple of years later, he tells the crowd, "We're gonna try our best to move you tonight, and if you like the blues, I think we can." And he did. Always.

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY

GETTY x3

THE BLUES COLLECTION

ON A MISSION FROM GOD!

Conceived in a bar. Introduced on a TV comedy show. Immortalised in a cult movie. THE BLUES BROTHERS exposed a generation to the brilliance of blues and soul legends like John Lee Hooker and Aretha Franklin.

Words: **Darren Weale**

The Dixie Square Mall that stood at the junction of 151st Street and the Dixie Highway in Harvey, Illinois had its grand opening in November 1966. By November 1978 it was abandoned. That's not to say the old girl had outlived her usefulness.

The following summer, director John Landis rented the site to shoot a demolition derby of auto destruction for his latest project, a musical comedy starring John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd as 'Joliet' Jake and Elwood, *The Blues Brothers*. Landis had new shop windows and merchandise put in; he signed up dealerships to stock the car park and mocked-up showrooms with the latest in shiny and fat-rubbered Detroit steel.

The mall was eventually razed to the asphalt in May 2012 but Landis and his team of stunt drivers gave the demolition crew one helluva head start on that summer night back in '79. The new cars and the mall would be wrecked in one spectacular money shot that was over in a matter of minutes.

By all accounts, that evening's filming was bang on schedule but then some of the cast and crew began to notice that one of their number was missing. "Nobody could find John," Dan Aykroyd tells *The Blues*. "I couldn't find him on set or in my trailer, his trailer, anyone's trailer. The radios were going crazy. It was 2am and we had to leave by dawn. Time and money were ticking away. I could just see $150,000 disappearing.

"I went to have a cigarette and stood under the stars, under the street lamps," he continues. "I could see broken street lamps and a path of tufts of grass and broken glass, with the lights fading into the distance, like when Frank Sinatra is in his raincoat as he walks away. It was a logical walk to follow and I went down it. Lights in the homes around were extinguished. It was a dark suburban neighbourhood."

ALAMY/GETTY

Aretha Franklin's performance of *Think* is one of the highlights of *The Blues Brothers*.

As he sauntered along the quiet street, Aykroyd spotted something glowing in the distance.

"One light was on," he recalls. "I knocked and a man came to the door. I said, 'I'm sorry to disturb you, I'm looking for a missing member of our film crew.' The man said, 'You mean Belushi? He's been here two hours, raided my fridge. He's asleep on the couch.'"

That evening is Dan Aykroyd's favourite memory of his late friend: "He was the guest who wouldn't leave."

Debuting in 1980, *The Blues Brothers* movie is a light-hearted musical comedy that became a culturally significant event. It introduced a generation ignorant of the cultural significance of African-American music like jazz, blues and soul to legends like Aretha Franklin, John Lee Hooker, James Brown and Cab Calloway.

Picking up his brother 'Joliet' Jake Blues from prison where he's served a three-year stretch for armed robbery, Elwood Blues has the audacity to turn up in The Bluesmobile (Illinois licence plate BDR529), a decommissioned '74 Mount Prospect, Illinois Dodge Monaco patrol car.

He swapped their Cadillac for a microphone. The new motor's attributes will come in handy when the brothers try to stay one step ahead of State Troopers, Illinois nazis and a pissed-off country band called The Good ol' Boys… and Jake's homicidal ex-girlfriend, played by Carrie Fisher. Says Elwood: "It's got a cop motor, a 440-cubic-inch plant. It's got cop tires, cop suspension, cop shocks. It's a model made before catalytic converters so it'll run good on regular gas."

"We became more than a comedy tribute. We were true blues."

The movie's plot is simple. The boys return to the St. Helen of the Blessed Shroud orphanage in Calumet City, Illinois, where they were raised by Sister Stigmata – aka The Penguin – to find that she's fighting closure. They need $5,000 to pay property taxes and stay in business.

'Joliet' Jake and Elwood visit the evangelical church service of Cleophus James (played brilliantly by James Brown), where Jake suddenly sees the light. It's a mission from God. Put their old band The Blues Brothers back together, put on a show and collect enough dough to save the orphanage.

All they have to do is find their old bandmates.

But hey, we're getting ahead of ourselves here. As Steve Cropper told us, *"The Blues Brothers* was a band way before it was a movie…"

In 1975, Belushi joined the cast of comedy sketch show *Saturday Night Live*. His trademark skit involved dressing up as a bumble bee and singing Slim Harpo's 1957 Excello Records B-side *I'm A King Bee* (*'Well, I'm a king bee, buzzin' around yo' hive'*). It was Dan Aykroyd that sparked Belushi's initial interest in blues music (he was bored of rock and hated disco) but singer and harpist Curtis Salgado gets the credit for fanning the embers. "He sure turned John on to blues music," acknowledges Aykroyd. "He steeped him in blues culture. I listened to him for my own harmonica practice."

Salgado first met John Belushi in October 1977, when the comedian was in Eugene, Oregon, filming another John Landis-directed picture, *National Lampoon's Animal House*. Although he was a familiar face on TV, Belushi's portrayal of John 'Bluto' Blutarsky – a cross between 'Groucho Marx and the Cookie Monster' – in the movie would prove to be the role that made him a king bee for real; a Hollywood A-lister. Salgado however, had no idea who this guy was.

"When he saw me play, he asked a local cocaine dealer and hanger-on, 'Who's that guy on stage?'" recalls Salgado. "I was with The Nighthawks with Robert Cray in the King Cole Room of the Eugene Hotel in Portland. I was in mid-set when a guy comes up and says, 'John Belushi wants to talk to you.' I say, 'I'm singing. Fuck off.'

Despite Salgado's charming riposte, Belushi was determined to make his acquaintance.

"I jump off stage and head to a group of girls," he recalls. "This guy grabs me and spins me around, says, 'Meet John Belushi.' This other guy reaches out his hand. I'm looking around over my left shoulder at the girls when Belushi says, 'I love your music. It reminds me of a friend of mine. His name is Dan Aykroyd. He looks like you, he plays harp too.' I think, 'Great, that's just what I need, another harp player.'"

Belushi explained that in addition to filming *Animal House*, he was still fulfilling his *Saturday Night Live* commitments by flying back to New York at the end of each week.

"I never saw it," says Salgado of the show. "I'm a working musician. No time for TV. We have radio in our house."

As he tried in vain to brush Belushi off, Salgado finally heard something that really snagged his full attention.

"I'm packing up my harps, trying to break free, when he says, 'I'm going to have Ray Charles on the show.' I turn and say, 'You got to ask him about Guitar Slim and *The Things That I Used To Do*. You can hear Ray shout at the end of the record that it's a take.'"

Ray Charles was in his early 20s when he arranged, produced and played piano on Eddie 'Guitar Slim' Jones' million-selling 1953 rhythm and blues smash. By now warming to Belushi, Salgado dropped another nugget about The Genius into the conversation. "I said, 'Do you know Ray plays alto sax? He did on *Live At Newport* [released on Atlantic Records in 1958] on a song called *Hot Rod*.'"

"After the show finished we partied a bit and he flew out," says Salgado. "*Saturday Night Live* plays the following weekend. On the Sunday morning, rumours are spreading that Ray Charles played sax for the first time in 17 years on *Saturday Night Live* with the Saturday Night Live Band, as a guest. I think, 'I did this.'"

Belushi was paying attention. He was getting hooked on the blues and Curtis Salgado was to become his dealer.

"John calls me up, says, 'Let's get together,'" he remembers. "I start bringing him my records: Fats Waller, Magic Sam, Sonny Boy Williamson. 30 records… a big pile. Howlin' Wolf, Bobby Bland, Blues Consolidated. He dug Magic Sam. He absorbed it. He was serious – a very nice guy – and intense."

Pretty soon, of course, Belushi wants to perform this music…

"We played the Eugene Hotel every Monday, called ourselves The Cray Hawks," Salgado says. "A good crowd, a couple hundred. Then John Belushi began coming in. The word gets out and it was tenfold. He wants to sit in, asking me can he do *Johnny B. Goode* or *Jailhouse Rock*. I tell him they're corny. I turned him on to Floyd Dixon's *Hey Bartender* (released in 1954 on Cat Records). Sure enough, he's there next Monday. I said, 'I'll call you at the end of the second set.' The place was now packed. The audience goes apeshit when I announce we're doing a song with John Belushi. He gets up on stage."

> **"We thought of doing *Stairway To Heaven*. Duck said no."**

Belushi made the mistake of performing *Hey Bartender* in character to get laughs from the crowd. Salgado was not amused.

"I felt a little bitter," he admits. "He's doing the song with a gravelly voice and his hands clenched. I'm on harp and looking to my left, thinking, 'Is that Joe Cocker?' The audience are peeing their pants. I'm a bit disgruntled. That's not a serious way to do the song."

During the post-show analysis, Salgado gave Belushi a dressing down.

"He asks me, 'What did you think?'"

"I say, 'John, it's Joe Cocker.'"

'Yes, I do Joe on *Saturday Night Live*.'

"I punch his chest and say, 'You need to do this from here [pointing at his heart] and be yourself.' After that he didn't mimic anymore. He was himself."

"John came back from Oregon with a lust for the blues," remembers his widow, Judith Belushi. "He had tapes in his pockets and went to clubs."

Director John Landis on set.

The Blues Brothers concept was conceived when Belushi and Aykroyd met in a bar a few years earlier. John would sing; Dan would play the harp. Also present that night was *Saturday Night Live* musical director Howard Shore, who dubbed the union The Blues Brothers. The name hit the spot and stayed there.

The concept gathered momentum at the recording of *Saturday Night Live*.

"I made an arrangement for The Blues Brothers of the song *Rocket 88* and we rehearsed it with the Saturday Night Live Band," says trombonist Tom 'Bones' Malone. "We developed the characters and their steps, but we didn't get on the show. Instead, we were asked to warm up the studio audience. Their reaction was reasonably good.

"The next week we thought, let's do *Hey Bartender*," he continues. "Again, we didn't get on the show. Lorne Michaels, the show's producer, said he didn't see anything funny in The Blues Brothers. The next week we did nothing. The week after, he said, 'The show is three minutes short, what can we do?' John suggested The Blues Brothers. Lorne said, 'You may as well make fools of yourselves, but if the show goes over time I'll cut your part.' We did it and had an amazing reaction, with cards and calls from the TV audience."

Things started to move quickly. Record executive Michael Klenfner took John and Dan to see Ahmet Ertegün at Atlantic Records. He signed The Blues Brothers up. The boys now needed a band.

"John was the leader of The Blues Brothers Band," says Bones. "He chose me, [pianist and future *David Letterman Show* band leader] Paul Shaffer and [saxophonist] Blue Lou Marini. He told me to choose another horn player. I chose Alan Rubin [aka Mr Fabulous] from the Saturday Night Live Band. [Legendary songwriter of *Viva Las Vegas, A Mess Of Blues* and others] Doc Pomus was John's blues guru in New York and he chose Matt 'Guitar' Murphy to join the band. I recommended Donald 'Duck' Dunn and Steve Cropper."

Dan Aykroyd remains grateful to Malone, Marini and Shaffer. "There would be no Blues Brothers without those gentlemen," he says. "It was Tom Malone and Paul Shaffer who suggested we approach Duck Dunn and Steve Cropper, who were playing with

Otis Redding. Then we became more than a comedy tribute. We became true blues with the full band and had the real essence of the music. Duck and Shaffer were both archivists and turned us on to so much. They were our musicologists, introducing us to songs like [James Brown's '69 hit) *Mother Popcorn (You Got To Have A Mother For Me)*. They and Lou Marini helped us treat the music with knowledge, humour and with confidence that we were venerating it. They gave John confidence as a singer and me as an instrumentalist."

Stax Records and Booker T & The M.G.'s alumni bassist 'Duck' Dunn and guitarist Steve 'The Colonel' Cropper initially thought the calls they received from John Belushi to recruit them for *The Blues Brothers* were bogus.

"I was mixing, and I tell the girls not to disturb me unless it is a friend calling me to go to lunch," Cropper remembers. "When Belushi called, they figured it was important enough to put through, but I didn't believe it was him. He'd be saying, 'I want you in the band,' and I'd say, 'You're not him!' I pretty much hung up on him.

"The mix I was doing was for guitarist Robben Ford. He says, 'What did he want?' I say, 'For me to go to New York and join The Blues Brothers Band.' He says, 'I'll do it.' I said, 'No you won't, I'm doing it.' I finished the mix and arrived a day later than John wanted."

Session saxophonist Tom 'Triple Scale' Scott and Saturday Night Live Band drummer Steve 'Getdwa' Jordan completed the lineup and The Blues Brothers began rehearsing for a run of shows at the Universal Amphitheatre in Los Angeles, opening on September 9, 1978 for comedian Steve Martin.

While choosing the setlist should have been easy – especially with a couple of Stax legends onboard – Aykroyd admits he made a few odd suggestions.

"I didn't believe it was Belushi calling. I hung up on him."

"We thought of doing a blues version of *Stairway To Heaven*," he says. "Duck said no."

"The Blues Brothers had been rehearsing with Duck a day before I arrived," adds Steve Cropper. "I get there and Duck says to me, 'These guys are rehearsing songs no one has ever heard of.'"

Stairway denied, the band replaced it with the 1967 Sam & Dave Stax classic, *Soul Man*.

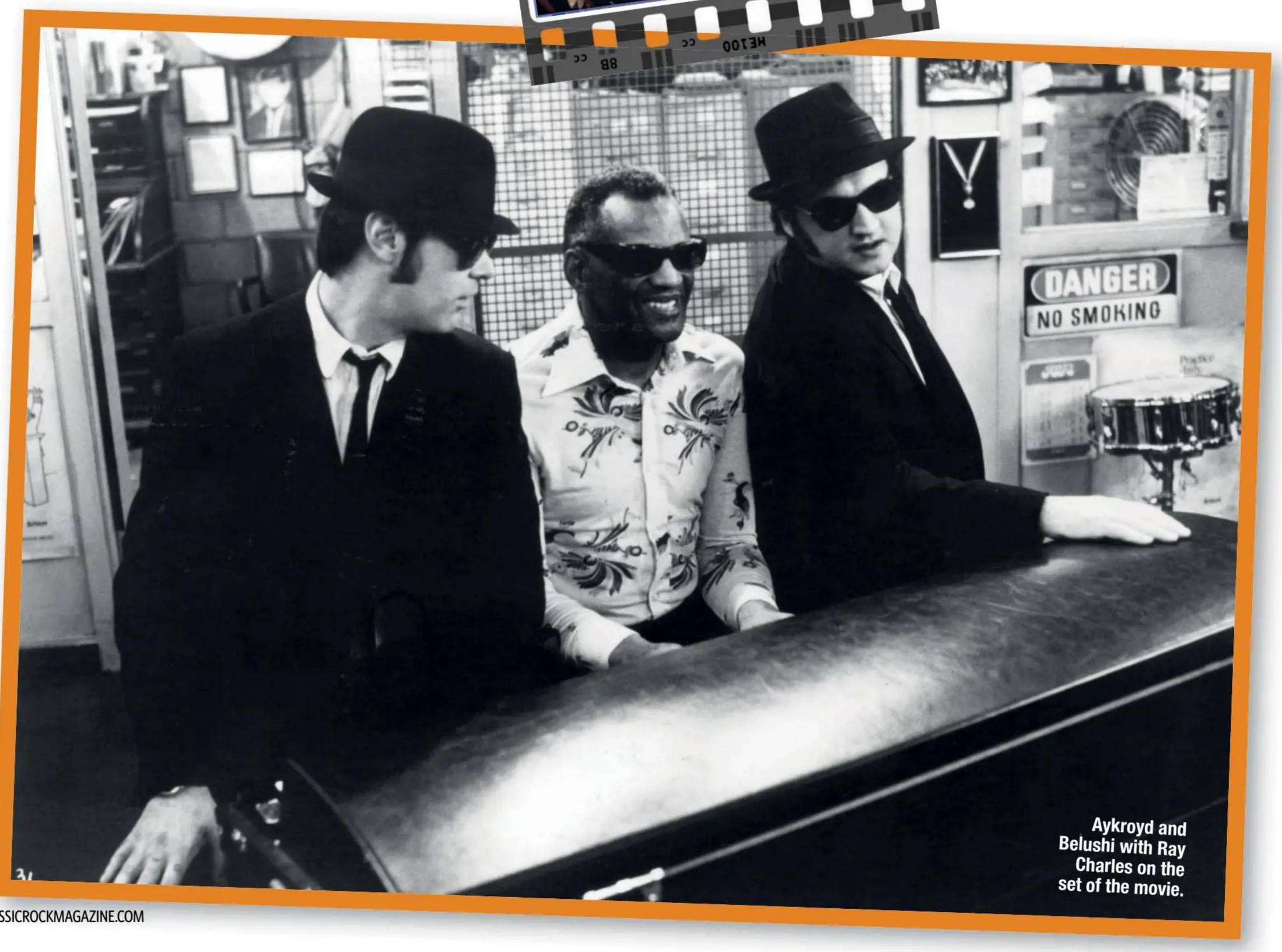
"I say to Shaffer, 'You know *Soul Man*?'" remembers Cropper. John says, 'I can't sing it that high!' but we played it in the key of E instead of the key of G and we have done ever since. A better key!"

The live cut of *Soul Man* eventually peaked at 14 on the Billboard Hot 100. Cropper also had some thoughts on 'Joliet' Jake and Elwood's stage presentation. "I saw them singing standing still and said, 'You've got to move around more, like Sam and Dave.'"

The first Amphitheatre show was released as the 1978 Atlantic Records album, *A Briefcase Full Of Blues*. It was dedicated to Curtis Salgado.

"Nobody in the crowd expected to see Dunn and Cropper," says Steve Jordan of the band's live debut. "We hit the stage on fire and played [Otis Redding's '65 B-side] *Can't Turn You Loose*. The crowd was shocked and stunned. We just ripped it up. People were freaking out."

"Afterwards, John pulled me into his trailer with Dan and opened a bottle of Dom Perignon champagne," Jordan adds. "There was a knock on the door and Mick Jagger and Linda Ronstadt walked in. I'd seen that in my dreams. Jagger was all smiles – it was like a whirlwind, a congratulatory visit."



Aykroyd and Belushi with Ray Charles on the set of the movie.

REX FEATURES/GETTY

"On the third night, I was the outside horn, nearest the audience," remembers Marini. "I saw Jack Nicholson in the audience. He looked at me, lifted his sunglasses and went, 'Wow!'"

When the decision was made to make a movie based around the band and its two leading characters, some line-up changes had to be made. Other commitments meant that Paul Shaffer, Steve Jordan and Tom Scott were unavailable. Willie 'Too Big' Hall stepped in on drums. Hall played with the Bar-Kays band at Stax and Isaac Hayes's band The Movement; he played percussion on Hayes' album *Hot Buttered Soul* and his *Theme From Shaft*.

Murphy 'Murph' Dunne took over on keyboards (the boys rescue him from lounge-band hell and his band Murph And The MagicTones). Tom Scott was not replaced, taking the band back down to a three-man horn section.

Dan Aykroyd spent six months writing the screenplay for what would eventually become *The Blues Brothers* movie. The result was a 324-page slab (bound in the covers of an LA Yellow Pages as a joke) that was too unwieldy to reproduce onscreen. The movie's director John Landis spent a fortnight whittling Aykroyd's efforts into a workable script. The finished result contained some of the greatest movie dialogue ever. *The Blues Brothers* is second only to *This Is Spinal Tap* for killer quotes.

There's the classic moment when 'Joliet' Jake and Elwood have the necessary scratch to save the orphanage and need to get it into the right hands. What ensues is an orgy of car crashes as they're pursued by State Troopers – including John Candy as Burton Mercer – and Illinois Nazis, whose leader was brilliantly portrayed by Henry Gibson. And what dialogue kicks off the mayhem!

Elwood: "It's 106 miles to Chicago, we got a full tank of gas, half a pack of cigarettes, it's dark… and we're wearing sunglasses."

Jake: "Hit it."

Then there's the scene where the brothers seek out Matt 'Guitar' Murphy and Blue Lou Marini at Mrs Murphy's (aka Aretha Franklin) Soul Food Cafe.

Nate's Deli at 807 W. Maxwell Street in Chicago served as the backdrop for the exterior shots of the cafe. The interior was created on a studio lot. As Jake and Elwood approach the cafe, we're treated to a performance of *Boom Boom* by Street Slim (played by John Lee Hooker); harpist Big Walter Horton (as Tampa Pete); Pinetop Perkins (as Luther Jackson) on electric piano; Willie 'Big Eyes' Smith on drums; guitarist Luther 'Guitar Jr.' Johnson; and Calvin 'Fuzz' Jones on bass. That's Chicago blues royalty performing in an area that has been eradicated forever by modernisation. The scene is a piece of blues history.

The brothers head into the cafe and encounter Mrs Murphy. Matt 'Guitar' Murphy is the short order cook in the kitchen; Blue Lou Marini is washing the dirty dishes.

Mrs. Murphy: "May I help you boys?"

Elwood: "You got any white bread?"

Mrs. Murphy: "Yes."

Elwood: "I'll have some toasted white bread please."

Mrs. Murphy: "You want butter or jam on that toast, honey?"

Elwood: "No ma'am, dry. ("I love dry white toast," Aykroyd tells us. "These days I like to take it with some American Michigan sturgeon caviar on it.")

Mrs Murphy turns her attention to Jake.

Jake: "Got any fried chicken?"

Mrs. Murphy: "Best damn chicken in the state."

Jake: "Bring me four fried chickens and a Coke."

Mrs. Murphy: "You want chicken wings or chicken legs?"

Jake: "Four fried chickens and a Coke."

Elwood: "And some dry white toast please."

Mrs. Murphy: "Y'all want anything to drink with that?"

Elwood: "No ma'am."

Jake: "A Coke."

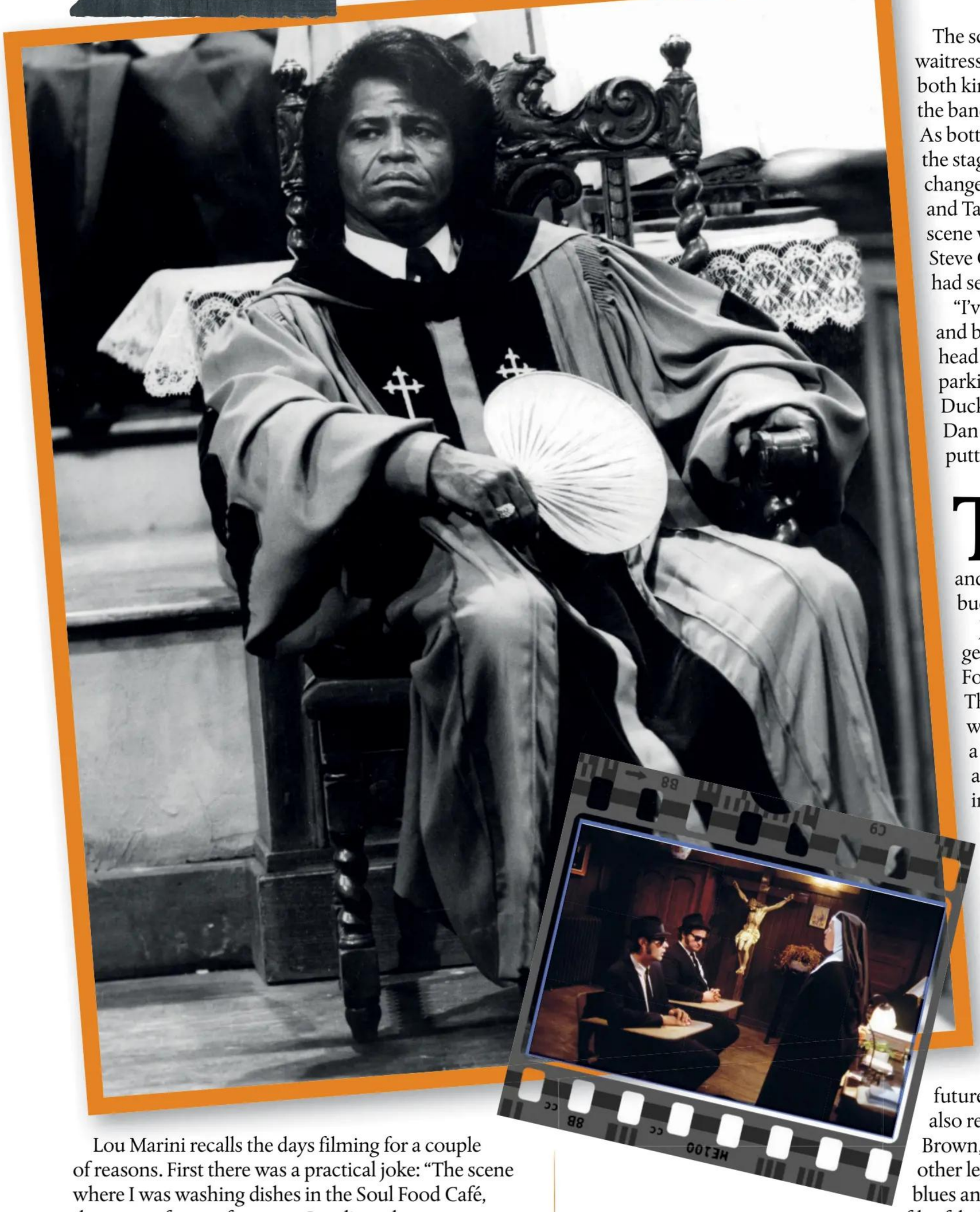
When she realises the brothers intend to lure her husband and dishwasher back on the road, the foot comes down.

"Now, you not going back on the road no more. And you ain't playing any more two-bit, sleazy dives. You're living with me now… and you're not gonna go sliding around with your white hoodlum friends."

After a smoking blast through her 1968 soul hit *Think*, Aretha's character loses her man to the mission from God. Blue Lou follows seconds later. "I pretended to be scared – I was supposed to be," says Matt Murphy on his confrontation with an angry, full-throttle Aretha Franklin. "But I was having a ball! I was almost cracking up when I looked at her."

"I had a ball! I was almost cracking up when I looked at Aretha."

REX FEATURES



Lou Marini recalls the days filming for a couple of reasons. First there was a practical joke: "The scene where I was washing dishes in the Soul Food Café, there were four or five guys. Landis and me, a camera guy, lighting guy, sound guy. Landis said, 'I want you to do the dishes, do what you like with them, get angry, throw them, break them. Whatever you do, don't look up till I say cut.' I was washing an eternally long time. I looked up and they've all split. I yelled and down the end at the coffee shop I heard them cracking up."

He was less amused by his portrayal during the *Think* routine. Some critics made reference to the fact that Marini's head was out of shot as he danced on the cafe's counter, playing his sax. He'd actually put a lot of effort into practising the nerve-wracking stunt. "It was a little daunting," he says. "The counter was raised up to four and a half feet up and was just two feet wide… and there were pots and pans down below."

The reason his head was chopped? The set didn't have a false ceiling. "The cameraman couldn't use the angle as the top was unsealed and the studio was in view," says Marini. "Landis took me to see a screening of the scene, said it was 'spectacular'. He said to me, "It was great, right?" I said it sucked. 'I learned to play and dance and you can't see my head.' I was told, 'You signed up for a lot of money and a little head, and that's what you got.'"

"I've seen guys shot, guys holding their guts after being stabbed..."

The scene at Bob's Country Bunker (where the waitress cheerfully informs the band they have both kinds of music: "country and western") sees the band incite a violent reaction from the patrons. As bottles smash on the chicken wire that isolates the stage from the paying customers, the band change tack and play *The Theme From Rawhide* and Tammy Wynette's *Stand By Your Man*. The scene was based on real-life experiences and as Steve Cropper told Dan Aykroyd at the time, he had seen worse.

"I've seen guys shot, guys holding their guts and belly after being stabbed, people hit on the head with baseball bats – a lot of blood in the parking lot. By the time we did *The Blues Brothers,* Duck and I were both seasoned musicians. Dan went round interviewing the band and putting bits of useful information into the script."

The tale of 'Joliet' Jake and Elwood Blues' mission from God hit cinemas in 1980. The receipts for the ensemble talent and all those wrecked cars busted the movie's budget by $10 million.

John Landis also encountered trouble getting *The Blues Brothers* into cinemas. For instance, Ted Mann, head of the Mann Theatres chain, was unconvinced that white movie-goers would be interested in a bunch of old black musicians. He also apparently didn't want blacks congregating in predominantly white areas to see it.

Ultimately, *The Blues Brothers* only opened in half the theatres that a similar size movie would enjoy. Some critics hated the movie for its thin plot and reliance on car chases for entertainment, but they were in the minority. The finished product is a blast. And despite Ted Mann and the critics' best efforts, 'Joliet' Jake and Elwood Blues found their audience.

The Blues Brothers made stars of Belushi and Aykroyd, allowing the latter to bankroll future box-office behemoths like *Ghostbusters*. It also reignited back-catalogue sales for James Brown, Aretha Franklin, John Lee Hooker and the other legends that appeared in the movie. Even blues and soul musicians that didn't feature in the film felt the benefit of the public's renewed interest in their brand of music.

The discovery of John Belushi's lifeless body on March 5, 1982 in Bungalow 3 at the Chateau Marmont on the Sunset Strip in Hollywood put paid to any notions of a sequel to the movie. Belushi was only 33 years old when he succumbed to the effects of a speedball, a combined hit of cocaine and heroin.

Aykroyd takes the opportunity to pay tribute to his late partner in crime by remembering one of his favourite scenes in the movie – the attempt to persuade Alan Rubin to quit his maitre'd post at Chez Paul, the high-end restaurant where "Even the fucking soup is ten dollars."

"The scene with John catching the shrimps in his mouth, he missed a few. I didn't throw them all. Landis threw some. John was like a seal! He could catch shrimps, sing, dance, he was a real negotiator, actor, manager. He managed himself and the band brilliantly. A woman put too much heroin into his injection and his lungs and stomach were already weak, and she did three years in jail for it. The world lost one of its greatest talents ever at the age of 33.

PHOTOSHOT/REX FEATURES

Below:: Carrie Fisher as Jake's homicidal ex-girlfriend. Left: James Brown.

"Maybe he was trying to numb the past, dull the present and look for comfort in the future. He found it there and it killed him.

"If he was here now, he'd be a top director on Broadway, putting on plays with great actors, part of the theatre world. He was very literate in his theatrical pursuits."

The temptation to make a sequel did eventually prove too strong and Landis and Aykroyd reconvened for the ill-fated *Blues Brothers 2000* in 1997. Despite some great musical performances, the absence of John Belushi was too big a hole to fill – even by John Goodman – and the movie bombed. Aykroyd's intentions, as ever, were honourable.

"Getting the blues more widely known was part of the message," he says.

The manifesto is right there in Elwood's monologue that kicks off the first track on *Briefcase Full Of Blues*…

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Universal Amphitheatre. Well, here it is, the late 1970s, going on 1985. You know, so much of the music we hear today is pre-programmed electronic disco, we never get a chance to hear master bluesmen practising their craft anymore. By the year 2006, the music known today as the blues will exist only in the classical records department of your local public library. Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, while we still can, let us welcome, from Rock Island, Illinois, the blues band of 'Joliet' Jake and Elwood Blues, The Blues Brothers."

Thanks to 'Joliet' Jake, Elwood and their mission from God, The Blues Brothers band, even their '74 Dodge Monaco cop car, the blues is still going strong.

"Getting the blues more widely known was part of the message."

Dan Aykroyd on preserving the soul of *The Blues Brothers*.

Dan Aykroyd is determined to protect the spirit and brand of *The Blues Brothers*. "There are *Blues Brothers* replicators around the world and those without a licence are legally questionable. If they work with Judy Belushi and I, we will raise awareness and publicity. We have unique things to offer like a web presence and publicity to help get people in and an authenticated review and for a very low cost. If you don't get licensed, you're ripping us off and not supporting the music. Authenticated acts are great for getting the word of the blues to young people – families can come and see their offspring challenged and introduced to the music."

We asked Brad 'Jake' Henshaw about the official British show, which we have enjoyed. The show captures the look, spirit, sound and moves of *The Blues Brothers* perfectly. Brad commented, "Having Dan and Judy's personal approval, it doesn't get any better. That is the gold medal of awards, the highest accolade."

REX FEATURES/ALAMY/GETTY

Big Mama Thornton: force of nature.

Big Mama Thornton

She was larger than life but the mighty-voiced R&B singer and songwriter deserves more recognition, says Alice Clark.

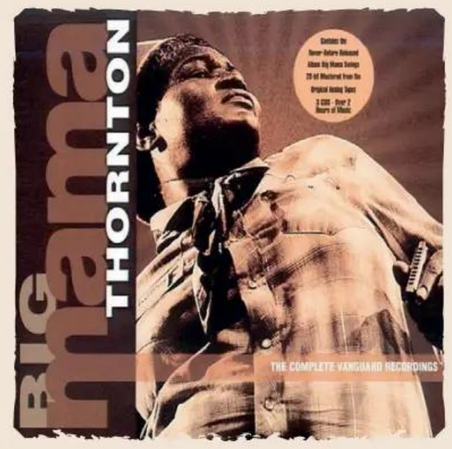
A BLUES SHOUTER with forebears Memphis Minnie, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, Montgomery, Alabama's Willie Mae Thornton, born 1926, changed the course of music history with two songs, 1953's *Hound Dog*, and *Ball And Chain*, released in 1968. The first, written by Leiber and Stoller with help from Johnny Otis, laid the foundations for rock'n'roll, rewarding Thornton with her sole US R&B Number 1 – it was, of course, covered by Elvis to even greater success. The second helped architect US blues rock when adopted by Janis Joplin and the Big Brother Holding Company. Despite this, Thornton remains cruelly underrated, although she was inducted into the Blues Hall Of Fame in 1984, the same year she died from complications from alcohol abuse.

A huge physical presence with a fiery temper and strong will, Big Mama, dubbed thus by Frank Schiffman, the manager of Harlem's Apollo Theater, dressed in men's clothing at a time when female singers were expected to wear sequinned gowns.

It was her huge voice, though, that demanded attention – although her blues harp and drumming skills were exceptional, too. Shaped in her local Baptist church, then from the age of 14 in promoter Sammy Green's Hot Harlem Revue and at 22 in Houston's Eldorado Club, her voice was as proud and lion-like as any of her male peers. Don Robey captured her tremendous roar first. Signed to his Peacock label from 1951-57, she issued a series of classics; 1951's debut *Partnership Blues* with trumpeter Joe Scott's band, *Hound Dog* in 1953, 1954's *I Smell A Rat*.

After stints on local labels she hooked up with Arhoolie for two albums, the first *In Europe* which saw her backed by Buddy Guy and Fred McDowell, the second with Muddy Waters' Blues Band. Tenures at Mercury (1969's *Stronger Than Dirt*, 1970's *The Way It Is*), Pentagram (1971's *Saved*, her only gospel album) and Vanguard were equally fruitful.

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction



THE COMPLETE VANGUARD RECORDINGS
Vanguard
Her most accomplished body of work, on triple-disc set.

Big Mama Thornton hit her creative stride immediately on arrival at the Vanguard label, with two albums from 1975, *Jail* and *Sassy Mama*. The first of these releases was inspired by Johnny Cash's *At Folsom Prison* and B.B. King's *Live In Cook County Jail* albums and was recorded live in Washington's Monroe State Prison and Oregon State Reformatory.

The second album was put down in the rather more perfunctory Vanguard's 23rd Street Studios in New York. Both albums are collected here in their entirety over three discs with *Mama Swings*, which recorded the same year went unissued until this reissue.

Live, Big Mama was a force of nature as *Jail* attests. Produced by General Hog Wyler, it captures her vocal tumult over a seven-song set that drives her literally captive audience wild. Backed by a seven-piece band featuring the mighty George 'Harmonica' Smith on blues harp, she wows with a playful *Hound Dog* and anguished *Ball N Chain*, plus a cracking *Rock Me Baby*. A 1977 live show at Montreal's Rising Sun Celebrity Jazz Club issued as *The Rising Sun Collection* on *Just A Memory* is also recommended, Big Mama delivering authoritative reworkings of *Sweet Little Angel*, *Summertime*, *Spoonful*, *Watermelon Man* et al.

Sassy Mama, meanwhile, sees her ably supported by a team of New York sessioneers including guitarist Cornell Dupree. Her vocal performances are poker hot, committed on *Rolling Stone*, a confident rewrite of Muddy Waters, plaintive on *Lost City*, determined on the title track. *Mama Swings* though is the real find. A genuine lost classic, Big Mama is cast as a torch singer in a jazz blues setting. It's exciting, daring and her delivery is quite frankly spectacular.

GETTY

SUPERIOR
The releases that built her reputation

THE ORIGINAL HOUND DOG
Ace

The cornerstone for rock'n'roll.

A lively 22-tracker that gathers her work for the Peacock label, the centrepiece is of course *Hound Dog*. Big Mama's wild, finger wagging admonishment, backed by a simple drum (played by Johnny Otis), bass (Albert Winston), and guitar (Pete Lewis) ensemble, is the apotheosis of her inimitable growl and improvised blues talk. Also included here, *I Smell A Rat*, her damning rockin' blues, *My Man Called Me*, a delicious birth of soul nugget and her statement of intent, *They Call Me Big Mama*, a compelling jump blues and current in-demand spin on the R&B scene.

IN EUROPE
Arhoolie

The two sides of Big Mama.

The first of two albums for Arhoolie, 1965's *In Europe*. Recorded in London's Wessex Studios, Big Mama with top notch band – Buddy Guy, Fred McDowell, Walter 'Shakey' Horton, Eddie Boyd et al, match fit from their recent American Folk Blues Festival Revue European sojourn – crank out covers (*Little Red Rooster*), hits (the inevitable *Hound Dog*) and autobiography (*Unlucky Girl*). The 2005 reissue includes six bonus cuts including the poignant *Chauffeur Blues*, one of three tracks that sees her backed solely by McDowell on slide. There's also an interview with Big Mama conducted by Strachwitz.

WITH MUDDY WATERS' BLUES BAND
Arhoolie

Two heroes for the price of one.

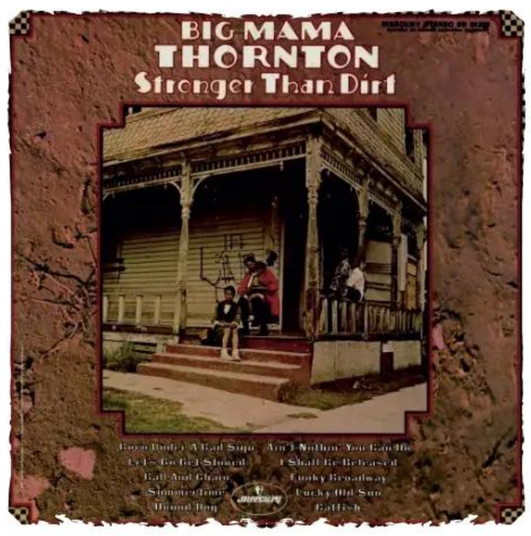
With Muddy Waters' Blues Band is just that, Big Mama in San Francisco's Coast Recorders studio in 1966, bolstered by harmonica player James Cotton, pianist Otis Spann and Waters himself on guitar. It's the perfect pairing – the band's rowdy rhythms providing the backbone as Thornton belts out a set that refreshingly eschews her hits, this reissue adding seven bonus cuts to the original. First-rate throughout, but stand-outs are: the furious *Black Rat*, the emotion-sapping *Sometimes I Have A Heartache* and the world-weary *Life Goes On*.

GOOD
Worth a butcher's

SAVED
Pentagram

Her sole gospel album.

Big Mama takes it to the river on her 1971 sole album of sanctified song for Pentagram, producer Al Schmitt's Los Angeles-based label. She tears the roof off the proverbial chapel with *Glory, Glory Hallelujah*, strikes terror in the heart with *Go Down Moses*, recasts *Down By The Riverside* and *Lord Save Me*, the first as esoteric soul, the second as Southern funk with bubbling organ and greasy guitars. Other highpoints include an ecstatic *Oh Happy Day* plus an exuberant version of the folk spiritual *He's Got The Whole World In His Hands*.



STRONGER THAN DIRT
Mercury

The covers collection.

Her 1969 first for Mercury, produced by Al Schmitt, sees Big Mama breathing new fire into old standards – *Summertime*, *That Lucky Old Sun* – and putting her own spin on songs made famous by Albert King (*Born Under A Bad Sign* as simmering slow blues), Bob Dylan (a preachy, rafter-raising *I Shall Be Released*), Ray Charles (an impish *Let's Go Get Stoned*) and Wilson Pickett (a tear-it-up *Funky Broadway*). It's with Bobby Bland's *Ain't Nothin' You Can Do,* though, that she proves she's as adept at soul as she is at blues.

AVOID
Like the plague

VARIOUS THE BLUES... A REAL SUMMIT MEETING
Buddha

For completists only.

Big Mama never recorded a duff record, but you can swerve this live album from the 1973 Newport Jazz Festival, not for the music, but because only two songs (*Little Red Rooster*, *Ball N' Chain*) are by her. The rest comprises performances by Jay McShann, Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup, Lloyd Glenn, Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown, Muddy Waters, B.B. King and Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

HOUND DOG
THE ORIGINAL HOUND DOG

I SMELL A RAT
THE ORIGINAL HOUND DOG

MY MAN CALLED ME
THE ORIGINAL HOUND DOG

THEY CALL ME BIG MAMA
THE ORIGINAL HOUND DOG

BIG MAMA'S COMING HOME
IRMA SINGLE

YOU DID ME WRONG
BAY-TONE RECORDS

CHAUFFEUR BLUES
IN EUROPE

LITTLE RED ROOSTER
IN EUROPE

BLACK RAT
WITH MUDDY WATERS' BLUES BAND

SOMETIMES I HAVE A HEARTACHE
WITH MUDDY WATERS' BLUES BAND

BALL AND CHAIN
BALL N' CHAIN

I SHALL BE RELEASED
STRONGER THAN DIRT

AIN'T NOTHIN' YOU CAN DO
STRONGER THAN DIRT

GO DOWN MOSES
SAVED

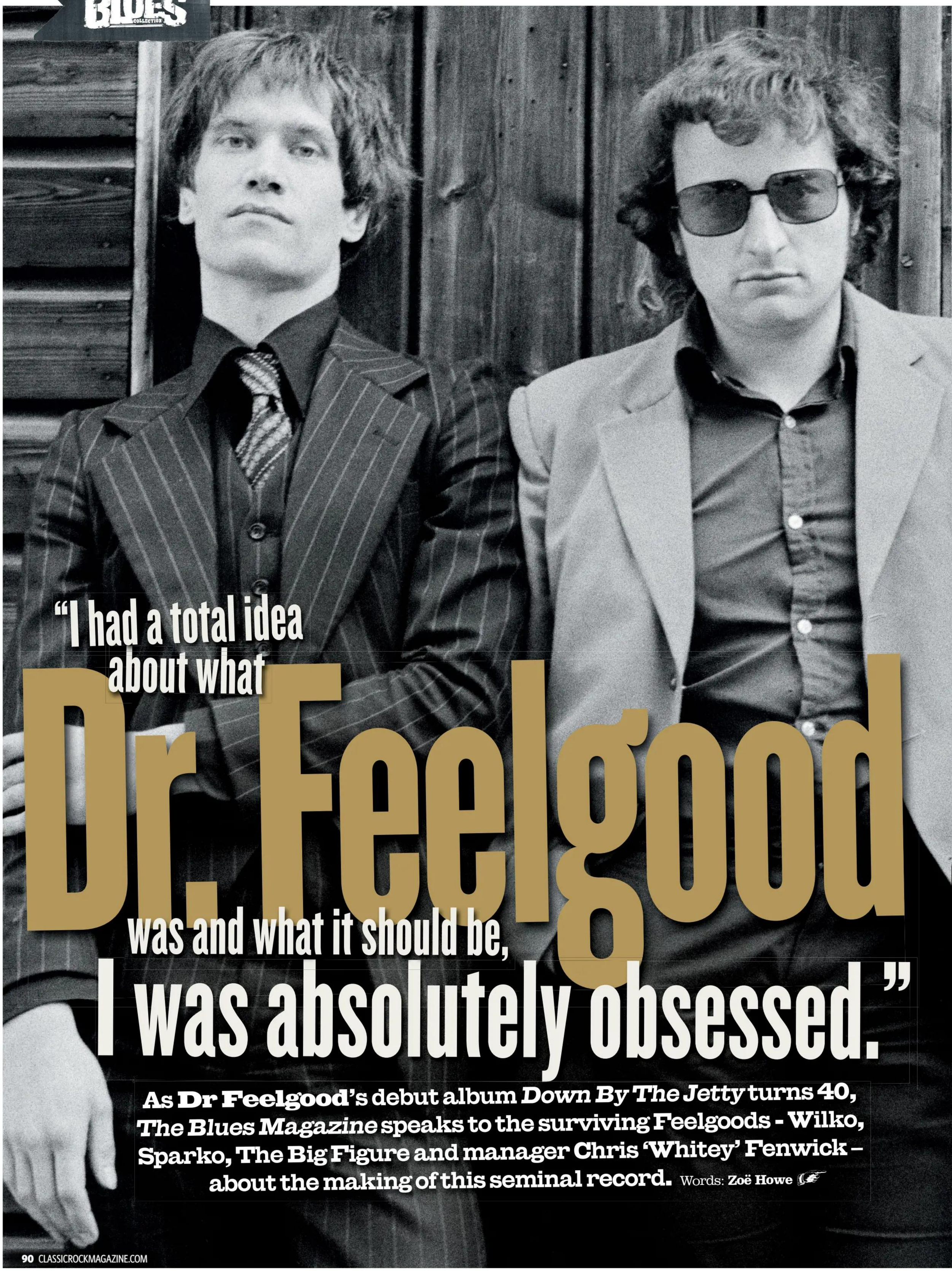
LORD SAVE ME
SAVED

ROCK ME BABY
JAIL

ROLLING STONE
SASSY MAMA

SASSY MAMA
SASSY MAMA

LIFE GOES ON
WITH MUDDY WATERS' BLUES



“I had a total idea about what Dr. Feelgood was and what it should be, I was absolutely obsessed.”

As Dr Feelgood’s debut album *Down By The Jetty* turns 40, *The Blues Magazine* speaks to the surviving Feelgoods - Wilko, Sparko, The Big Figure and manager Chris ‘Whitey’ Fenwick – about the making of this seminal record. Words: **Zoë Howe**

GETTY

Suited and booted, Dr Feelgood (l-r): Wilko Johnson, Lee Brilleaux, John 'The Big Figure' Martin, John B Sparks.

You've got to remember this is forty years ago, one has to file back..." warns Dr Feelgood manager Chris 'Whitey' Fenwick as I prepare to pick his brain about the band's debut album, *Down By The Jetty*, that raw, sharp slice of R&B that came spinning out of the Thames Delta like a freshly-flung chakram in January 1975. But Fenwick has had the album on the turntable again in preparation for our conversation and, "it's been fun to revisit it. It's brought back the excitement of the early gigging period – we were gaining altitude by the month... This album's been a very strong part of my life. Forty years..." he muses. "It's got bloody long legs."

The definitive line-up of Dr Feelgood consisted of guitarist Wilko Johnson, the much-missed Lee Brilleaux on vocals/harmonica (Lee died from cancer in 1994), bassist Sparko (John B Sparkes) and drummer John 'The Big Figure' Martin.

Nicknames were necessary as all of the Feelgoods, with the exception of Brilleaux, were called John. Lee's middle name was John, however, and when Wilko – real name John Wilkinson – left in 1977, his replacement was Gypie Mayo, whose real first name was – you guessed it – John.

Here were four tough Canvey Island boys with style, attitude and an obsession with rhythm and blues, to the extent that, as Howlin' Wolf fanatic Lee Brilleaux told *Sounds* journalist Jonh Ingham shortly after the release of *Down By The Jetty*, "There's nothing white that I draw off at all. Everything's black."

Lee Brilleaux's real name was Lee Collinson. The name 'Brilleaux' arose when, one day, he felt his hair had taken on the look of a Brillo pad. After playing around with announcing himself as 'Lee Brillo', he decided to make the name a permanent feature, changing the spelling in an attempt to sound more like a Louisiana bluesman than the sort of thing one might find under the sink.

A self-confessed music snob from a relatively early age, Lee was not initially interested in rock'n'roll, with the exception of The Rolling Stones. "To me, it was the stuff the generation before me were into. I used to half send it up. My uncle was into Elvis, he had a silly haircut... Fucking rubbish."

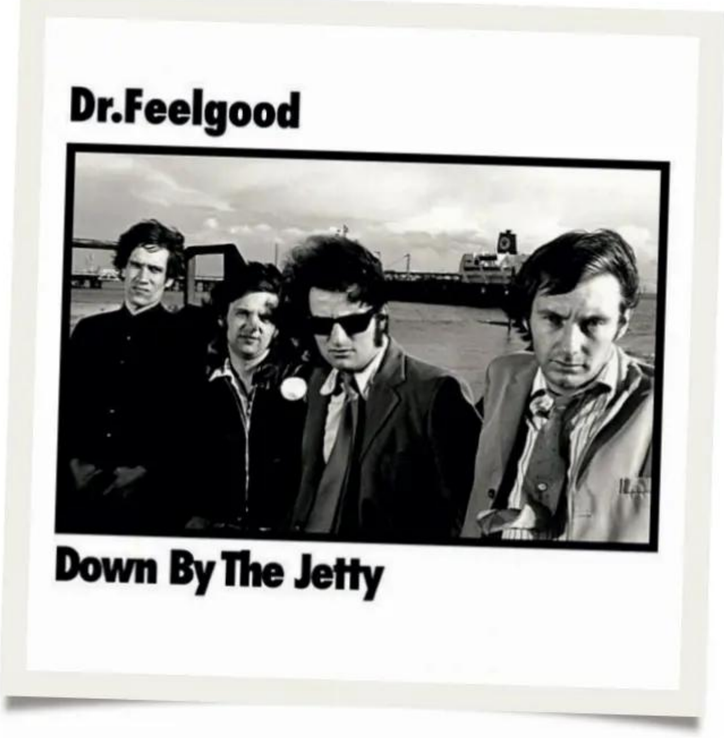
It was when Lee and his childhood friends Whitey and Sparko, stumbled across a jug band playing on the streets of Canvey Island, a tall, charismatic older teenager on guitar, that Lee's love of the blues was really ignited. It would also be the first fateful meeting between Lee, Sparko, Whitey and Wilko Johnson. It was Lee who made the strongest impression on Wilko: "I remember walking back home with my brother Malcolm, going, 'Fucking hell, that kid's a bit sharp! He was vivid. He *radiated*."

The now well-documented story of how Dr Feelgood first came together as a band can be summarised thus. After going to University in Newcastle and following the hippie trail across India, the long-haired Wilko returned home to find a rather more grown-up Lee Collinson, now working as a solicitor's clerk, stalking the streets of Canvey in a pin-striped suit ("Man, he looked so mean!" exclaims Wilko, still gasping at the memory).

Lee, inspired by Wilko, had initially started a jug band of his own with Whitey, Sparko and schoolfriends Phil 'Harry' Ashcroft and Rico Daniels, but, as the years had progressed, the band had developed into a rock group. Lee, not exactly lacking in formidable presence himself, was over-awed by Wilko and left it to Sparko to invite Canvey's prodigal son to join on guitar; the answer to which was an unequivocal 'yes'. Wilko eventually brought Figure, his old schoolfriend, sometime bandmate and already a semi-pro drummer, on board.

Before long, they'd moved on from playing covers to indifferent pub audiences ("we used to do *Heartbeat*," sneers Wilko. "Can you imagine Lee singing *Heartbeat*?") to going back to their roots and just playing the music they loved – which turned out to be a very good move indeed. "We were having a rehearsal and Lee put a Little Walter record on," remembers Wilko. "And I said, 'Oh, fuck all this pop music, let's just do this stuff instead.'

"We were having fantasies about being on the road, it was like *The Blues Brothers* before that film even came out. We were into that whole thing of the suits and committing stupid crimes while on the road – we anticipated that." They would also anticipate punk in terms of their



violently energetic stage act and their look. No cheesecloth shirts here; we're talking skinny ties, dirty 'whistles' and defiantly short haircuts, although, after perhaps being asked one too many times about their image, Lee once sniffed to *Let It Rock*'s Mick Gold in 1975 that "we didn't set out to look like deranged bank clerks." (And he says it like it's a bad thing...)

Soon, Wilko had written a clutch of songs for the band and they tapped into – and swiftly conquered – London's burgeoning pub-rock scene, winning over tough crowds with their thrilling blend of stage presence and sonic attack, hurling grenades into the 'groovy' post-hippie fug before roaring off into the night, back down the A13 to Essex.

A major part of the Feelgoods' appeal was the crackling interplay between the band's two besuited frontmen: Wilko, with a psychotic look in his eye, wheeling forth as if his guitar has sprung to life and is jerking him uncontrollably about the stage; Lee, vulpine and murderous, ignoring Wilko, smoking furiously, eyes burning and fist pounding at the air. Pure theatre, of course. All the same, you wouldn't want to mess.

"Lee was very edgy," says Wilko, "But capable of being very funny, obscene. I think he looked up to me, but he probably never knew that I had absolute respect for him. When we were onstage – I mean, you look at any film of us – all the time, I'm looking at him. I always had a terrific belief in him as a performer, as a star, right from the beginning, and I never lost that. Lee was, to me, the lynchpin of Dr Feelgood.

"We were like The Blues Brothers, into the thing of the suits, before that film came out."

"I remember us playing at the Lord Nelson [in North London's Holloway Road], there was a little sunken disco floor. Suddenly this fight has broken out, and there are these guys on the floor slugging it out. A knife has appeared, and Lee just steps off the stage, takes the knife, and carries on singing. This was serious, one of these guys had his ear nearly cut off and Lee just took the knife. Onstage, Lee was the man. I've never known anything like it. To stand onstage with someone and feel that close with them, fantastic."

Andrew Lauder, then A&R man for United Artists, would happen upon the Feelgoods in 1974 thanks to a tip from Nick Lowe, then a member of pub rock band Brinsley Schwarz. Lauder, at the time, was collating a beat group compilation which included two tracks by Johnny Kidd's erstwhile band The Pirates. The Pirates were as much a favourite group of Lauder's as they were Wilko Johnson's, particularly because of the guitarist Mick Green, whose style Johnson feverishly tried to emulate.

"Nick had come in to UA, which was a very sociable office in the middle of the West End," says Lauder. "People would pop by and see if there were any records worth having or have a cup of coffee or a joint or whatever. He said, 'Funny you mention the Pirates. I just saw this group two nights ago who reminded me of them. They're called Dr Feelgood. You should go and see them, you'll love them.' I went to see them as soon as I could. Any group that reminds someone like Nick of Johnny Kidd And The Pirates has got to be worth a visit."

Lauder went to The Kensington, one of the main London pub rock venues, to see the Feelgoods play. "I just fell in love with it. The Feelgoods made perfect sense to me. I immediately thought, 'I've got to sign these guys.' Just before we signed

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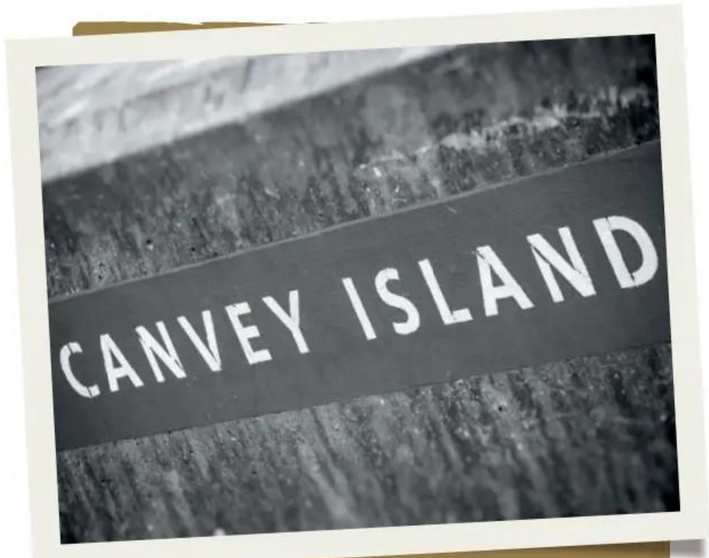
Live and dangerous: Dr Feelgood in action.



A Need To Know Basis

Canvey Island Trivia.

• The '*towers burning at the break of day*' referred to in *All Through The City* burn no more. The Estuarine skyline changed forever in 2012 when the Coryton Refinery closed and the flame was extinguished. Seven hundred jobs were lost and the iconic towers are now set to be demolished.

• Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* features a reference to the Lobster Smack pub, a drunken stumble from the jetty on the front of *Down By The Jetty*. This spot was notorious for smugglers and bare-knuckle boxing, and remains a romantic draw for Wilko: "Up by the Lobster Smack, I feel just like Wordsworth felt about Windermere..."

• Another significant Feelgood haunt was the Admiral Jellicoe, where you could ask for "Feelgood measures" – one step up from doubles. Alternatively, you'd find the band back at Feelgood House, a redoubtable bachelor pad that boasted a bar and floodlights on the lawn, for whenever the desire arose to play croquet in the middle of the night (which was surprisingly often).

• Lee Brilleaux was a sartorial sight to behold as he stalked the streets of Oil City; in addition to his suit obsession, he had a passion for "foot furniture". He'd be pleased to know that shoesmiths Jeffery West have created a shiny, pointy clodhopper named "The Brilleaux".

• Another Canvey star is the mysterious Canvey Island Monster. This unlovely "fish with feet" (and sharp teeth), washed up in 1953, presumably having drifted from somewhere exotic. An artist's impression online is evocative of an angry Mr Blobby.

• January 31, 1953 was the night of the Canvey flood, which took 58 lives and saw the Island evacuated (evacuees included the young Feelgoods, minus Lee Brilleaux, who hadn't yet moved to Canvey). The tidal surge forced many to take to their rooftops during the freezing night as the waters reached the ceilings of their bungalows.

• Canvey Islanders are a proud bunch, leaping to the Island's defence whenever it's voted one of the UK's worst places to live. The website www.chavtowns.co.uk dubbed it "a great place to take your kids – if you hate them."

them, there was a gig at Cardiff University... I mean, we just went to as many gigs as possible. You wanted to take people to see them and go, 'You've got to see this group!' It was totally unlike anything else. In terms of negotiating a contract, it was a matter of a few days, it all happened very quickly."

Ever economically savvy, the Feelgoods immediately took a chunk of their first advance and "bought a 40-seater second-hand coach," proclaims manager Chris Fenwick proudly. Part of the Feelgood schtick, no doubt largely thanks to Fenwick himself, was to be as autonomous as possible at all times. No equipment hire, no van hire, no petrol stations; they'd more often than not bring their own fuel from Canvey 'Oil City' Island itself. They watched every penny. (All the more money for booze.)

"We converted this coach, put bunks in it and extended the boot to take all of the equipment and everything we carried with us, and we proceeded to gig with it," explains Fenwick. "Great memories of the old coach."

It's just as well he was fond of the Feelgood mobile, because when the band went to Rockfield Studios in rural Wales in the summer of 1974 to cut their first disc, the record that would become *Down By The Jetty* (the title being a very Canvey-themed lyric from the song *All Through The City*), Fenwick would end up sleeping in it, so "primitive" was the accommodation at the studios at that time.

"We were asked to go to Rockfield and lay down anything," Lee Brilleaux casually informed *Sounds* in 1975, with Wilko explaining further that "They wanted us to do a single and we done about 20 tracks. None of us had been in a recording studio. It was just four blokes making a record."

"It was quite fast making the album, just two weeks in Rockfield," remembers Sparko. "I think most of our albums took about that time. We were always working so hard that getting the time off to record was always a problem. I think that's where we suffered – we didn't have enough time to get ready for recording. The first album wasn't so bad because we'd been playing the songs live for quite a while."

Perhaps unusually, the Feelgoods weren't going into the studio with an eye on what would make them more successful; what would break them out of the pub circuit, turn them into stars. Even more unusually, United Artists didn't seem to mind.

"They knew exactly what they were about," says Andrew Lauder. "It made it easier, them being so single-minded. It was so defined, you didn't have to think about it, you just had to go with it. It didn't require a lot of work; it was more a case of not getting in the way."

"United Artists were a wonderful record company when I think back," says manager Chris Fenwick, very much the 'fifth' Feelgood, and at the helm of the latest Feelgood line-up to this day. "A lot of people bitch about their record companies

Two's company: Brilleaux and Wilko, rehearsing at home in Essex.

GETTY X2, REX

but we were very lucky. Anyone else would have pushed us in a direction that might not have worked. UA left us to do what we wanted, they let us make our own mistakes too, but that's all part of it."

The Feelgoods knew the kind of record they wanted to make; and maybe it was the only record they could make, given their lack of experience in the studio at that point. But, basically, their intention was to recreate the hard, urgent sound and feel of their already notorious live shows.

"How did we prepare?" says John 'Big Figure' Martin. "Well, we didn't really. We were playing a lot. So I guess we considered we were pretty fit for the studio, it's only what we do with microphones put in front of us. But of course, it was a bit of a shock because it didn't really sound as I was expecting it to."

Andrew Lauder had brought the band together with the producer Vic Maile, a man the Feelgoods quickly became fond of, working with him again on their second album *Malpractice*. However, as inexperienced as they may have been, they weren't afraid to fight for their sound when they realised Maile was trying to record them in the way that, to be fair, had become the norm: laying down the rhythm track first before adding guitars and overdubs. Within the first week, Maile became forcibly aware that this was not what the band had in mind, courtesy of one of Wilko's dreaded "wobblers".

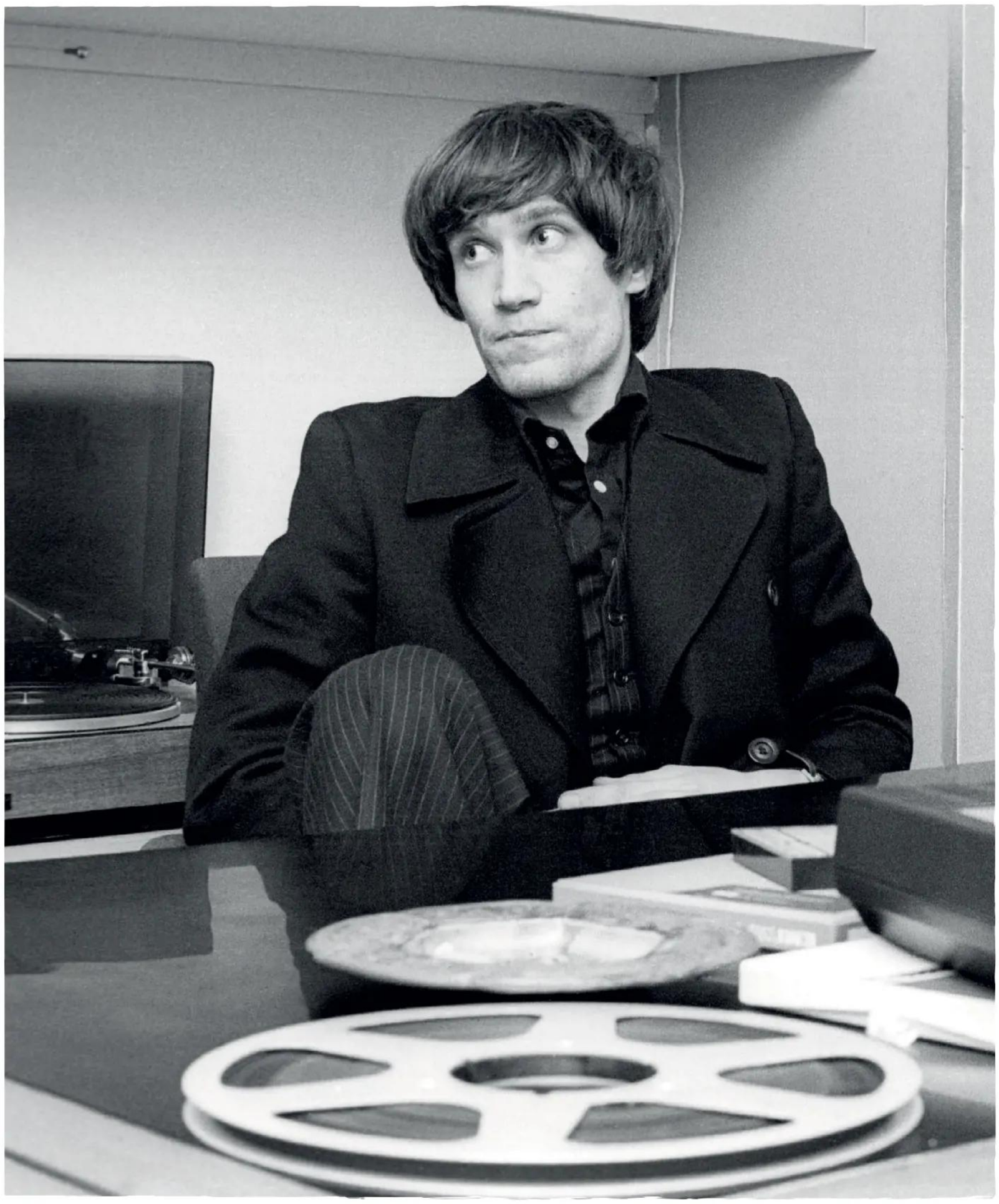
"I said, 'We ain't going to do it like that.' There was a bit of trouble over it but I didn't believe that the records I loved had been made like that. Anyway," Johnson declares. "Overdubs are strictly for pansies."

"There was some discussion with Vic," concurs Figure with his customary tact. "What Vic was doing didn't appear to be doing it for me. It's hard to imagine the finished article while you're recording it. But Wilko was distinctly anti what was happening, and he was quite sure that we should just record the band as it is, without any faffing around. I was happy to go along with that. If there were any mistakes we'd do our best to repair them, but we didn't really want to over-do it.

"Everything gets so fiddled about with, this taken out, that taken off, and you end up losing the picture. If a band's successful live, the crowds are going to get bigger, and the crowds did get bigger – they got massive. So logically the thing to do is to try to reproduce that sound on vinyl."

"At the time I liked recording like that," says Sparko. "In the Gypie [Mayo] days, we started using the studio to our advantage more, but it was a good way of starting off. I don't think I'd like to carry on making albums in that way, but it was relevant at the time. We learned so much about recording from Vic Maile... I built a studio after that down on Canvey for making our demos. I got into it in quite a big way."

Lee Brilleaux, on the other hand, "didn't take much interest in the technical side," as Sparko remembers it. To put it another way, Feelgood roadie Freddie Barker describes Lee's studio style as: "Go in, do one take, get out, go down the pub."



The basement tapes: Wilko Johnson in the studio, 1975.

> **"Wilko was sure we should record the band as it is, without any faffing around."**

The fact *Down By The Jetty* is recorded in 'mono' is a point that always comes up when the album is being discussed. But the decision was no retro pretension; it was a practical move. The Feelgoods felt it was important that, when people listened to the album at home, they wouldn't have the bass coming out of one speaker and the drums coming out of another. Mono was the way forward.

Wilko: "I didn't know anything about recording. You find things out for yourself, but I had this tendency to put the guitar player to the left, and the bass on the other side of the drums. We started out gradually moving everything into the middle, which in effect, is mono."

Much to Wilko's chagrin, the record company were keen to print the word 'mono' on the cover to make a feature of it. But this wasn't where the Feelgoods were coming from.

"We didn't want it to be called 'mono', we just wanted it to sound good," says Sparko. "When they did The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper* album, they split it up really strangely. You used to hear it when you'd go into some pubs and they'd have a speaker in each room. So when you were listening you'd only hear the drums and the vocals in one room... We wanted

to avoid that sort of thing."

"It's how you arrive at the term 'mono'," Figure explains. "But it is basically one mix coming out of two speakers. With stereo back then, they loved to play around with stereo. You used to get really odd sounds far right – the bass and drums should always be in the centre, when you see a band it's always in the middle – but they'd stick the bass over to the right for no apparent reason. It was just engineers having a good time. Nothing to do with the musical content. So that's how we felt about it and we thought, 'What the hell?' You know, people come to gigs to see us as we are... Anyway, we were very pleased with the upshot of it, the result was exactly what we were looking for."

While Wilko's determination helped the Feelgoods create the album they wanted, the force of his personality didn't always make for an easy atmosphere. The tensions between Wilko and the rest of the group in later years are legendary, but even at this point there were rumbles of discontent, not least because of the guitarist's desire to "control everything," as Wilko himself admits.

"I had a total idea about what Dr Feelgood was and what it should be when we did this album... designed the bloody thing, did the production, everything, I was absolutely obsessed. Maybe that didn't go down too well!" he laughs. "I would put my foot down about things and people would be saying, 'What does it matter?'"

> **"We played the Canvey Island 'delta' thing. It had more of an edge than coming from Swindon."**

However, as Figure puts it, "we felt there was no reason not to agree with what Wilko wanted to achieve. Wilko was really the constructor of how that album sounded and looked." As far as Lee was concerned, he trusted Wilko's judgment for this project. "Wilko is a genius," he later told *NME*. "That's all."

All the same, another reason for the ultimately irreparable division within the band was that, in this hard-drinking group, there was one person who was teetotal. Drugs were one thing, booze was another, and the effects of alcohol, in Wilko Johnson's opinion at the time, were somewhat crude in comparison to those of acid and even speed. And so, Wilko would miss many of the group's famous 'jolly-ups' that took place in the local hostelries – most notably The Punch House in Monmouth. Here was a pub appreciated so keenly by Lee, Sparko, Figure and Whitey that, for years to come, they would take detours while on the road in order to drop in on the place for lunch.

Sparko: "The landlord said, 'When you lot walked in here, I thought you were bad news.' But we ended up great friends. In fact, we got on so well with him we were even asked to join the darts team. We said, 'But none of us can play darts.' He said, 'But you can drink, can't you?' And that was our 'in'. We used to go touring around the other pubs with the people from the Punch House and be part of their team."

When I admit that the idea of encouraging some of the most serious drinkers in rock'n'roll to hurl sharp objects around in a confined space sounds like quite a bad one, Sparko assures me that, "There weren't many darts being thrown, just drinking."

Danger! Men at work: Wilko and Lee, 1975.

GETTY, REX x2

Despite the occasional "wobbler", as Wilko put it, there'd be plenty of jocularity at the studio too, thanks to the abundance of practical jokes being played during their stay at Rockfield. A particular favourite would be the following, according to chief prankster Sparko: "We'd put a Hoover under someone's bed and trail the cable out of the window," he explains. "Then we'd plug it in downstairs." And then, they'd bide their time until the victim-to-be bid the collective a good night, wait a few hours until he was definitely asleep, turn on the Hoover at the socket and enjoy.

There was even more fun to be had when the Feelgoods discovered that Brinsley Schwarz themselves were recording in the other studio at Rockfield with Dave Edmunds.

"We had a good time with them," recalls Figure. "Lee was at his comical best and we were just taking the mickey, we were being very cockney with them and they were a bit posh, but they were really enjoying it."

"They were quite shocked by us, I think," chuckles Sparko. "But we did get on. We'd go and sit in next door to listen to what Dave was doing when we had a bit of time. It was deafeningly loud – he had these extra speakers brought in because he was quite deaf. They were like huge wardrobes."

"Brinsley himself makes an appearance on the album," adds Figure, "as does Bob Andrews, the piano player. [They play saxophones on *Boney Moronie/Tequila*.] The last track on *Down By The Jetty* was recorded live at Dingwalls and that was with the Brinsleys; they were supporting. We generally used a couple of the Brinsleys when we were playing live, it was like a seven-piece band."

In terms of favourite songs on *Down By The Jetty*, the live tracks with the Brinsleys stand out for Figure, not least because it was all about bringing that live sound into people's homes: "Those tracks were good fun, and sounded like a gig, obviously. I remember *Roxette* also being one of my favourites, and *All Through The City*. Pleased with those."

The Mickey Jupp-penned *Cheque Book*, a hard-boiled *Route 66* and the Wilko-fronted cover of John Lee Hooker's *Boom Boom* remain beloved by fans, as do Wilko originals *She Does It Right, I Don't Mind* and *Keep It Out Of Sight*, the latter alongside the exuberant *All Through The City* amongst others having been revisited on Wilko Johnson's 2014 album with Roger Daltrey *Going Back Home*. But for many, *Roxette* is the definitive Feelgood number. Tough, sexy and threatening… it's hard to believe it started out as a chirpy doo-wop track.

"*Roxette* was changed quite a lot," explains Sparko. "'*Shadoodah-wop*' and all that... We weren't really happy with the way we'd been doing it and I think it was Lee's idea to use that riff, which is the main part of *Roxette* – it's the riff that makes the song."

Once sessions were complete, a hectic gigging schedule beckoned. "It had become very groovy to see Dr Feelgood," says Chris Fenwick, and, as was becoming the norm, there was increasingly little time to devote to anything other than playing live. Therefore, the shoot for the album artwork had to be fitted in at the only opportunity they had, which happened to be three o'clock in the morning after another triumphant London show.

The Feelgoods had hurtled back

Punk before punk: backstage in London, 1975.

Kraftwerk: "the sound of icecream vans gone wrong".

You're Havin' A Laugh!

Classic quotes and quips.

• Inspired by producer Vic Maile, Sparko would build a studio of his own shortly after the *Jetty* sessions were complete. The Big Figure describes the Feelgoods' new recording hub to *NME*'s Mick Farren: "It's a Scotch studio." "Scotch tapes?" Farren enquires. Not exactly. "He wanders around with a glass of Scotch in one hand wondering where he can plug in the wires," deadpans Figure.

• The Feelgoods had to share the 1970s with, among other things, a stark wave of electronica. Lee Brilleaux wasn't a fan. His take on Kraftwerk? "I thought it was a load of icecream vans gone wrong. I'd rather hear some geezer playing a comb and paper. You wanna hear a drum machine? Big Figure, that's what I call a drum machine!" he barked at *NME*'s Charles Shaar Murray.

• Wilko Johnson: "When the record company wanted to write 'mono' (on the cover), they started talking bollocks about the Trade Descriptions Act. I said, 'Can you not write "stereo" and then underneath in tiny letters write "monaural mix"? If you write mono on it, I'll be talking about this forever more.' And sure enough, here I am talking about it again."

• Lee Brilleaux muses on the split between Wilko and the other to *Blues Bag* in 1990. "What it boiled down to was that Wilko didn't fit in with the rest of us. Looking back, poor Wilko must have been miserable and depressed."

• Wilko Johnson: "I look back on Dr Feelgood sometimes and I would do a lot of things differently. Oh man, I was intolerable. Sometimes I like to imagine I've got a time machine and I could whizz back and see myself when I'm 21 or 22. I'd really like to slap him around the head and say, 'You idiot!'"

• "If he's going to play that banjo, I'm going to have to have a very large gin." Lee Brilleaux grimly surveys the support act while in the company of *Melody Maker*'s Allan Jones.

• Sparko, on being asked by *NME*'s Paul Du Noyer in December 1979 what the band had planned for the new decade: "We're thinking of learning a new chord."

to Canvey, still soaking wet ("we didn't have dressing rooms or anything," says Wilko) and headed to the Lobster Smack pub by the sea wall with a photographer.

After taking some colour shots indoors, this odd-looking group of individuals – all windswept hair and dirty suits – wandered out to the jetty as the sun rose. They were exhausted, grimy and probably hadn't looked in a mirror for a while.

"It was the only time we could do it," says Figure. "If you look at the picture on the back Lee has actually fallen asleep. You can see his eyes are shut and his tie is cocking a snook to the wind... it was black and white, and we thought that would go with the mono thing on the album. Stark, that was the way to go."

"We were leaning on the wall, and the photographer started taking these black and white pictures to test it," says Wilko. "We were all falling asleep. When the pictures came through, I saw the black and white ones and said, 'That's it.' It looked like something was happening."

GETTY x2

Sharp dressed man: Sparko, Hammersmith Palais, 1975

(left) Watch your step: Wilko in 1975.

> **"Down By The Jetty would kick the music scene into touch and be hailed as a classic."**

Wilko also explains the lack of photographer credit on *Down By The Jetty* in the book *Wilko Johnson - Looking Back At Me*: "He'd taken some live shots which were quite good, so we said, 'We're doing this album', and we agreed what he would get for it. Later on, he decided he wanted ten times as much. It was our first album, but he was wanting the kind of money you'd want for a big job… So Chris said, 'All right, have your fucking money, but your name ain't going on the sleeve.'"

Chris Fenwick: "They gave us artistic freedom – we were creating all of this. The image we're selling is four blokes – four mean machines from the Thames Estuary. So what do you do? You go by the Thames Estuary and, as luck would have it, a Texaco oil tanker was in, and it just fell into place. For the moodiness we created, black and white was perfect. Everyone else was a bit... 'Are you sure, boys? Colour's the name of the game these days... people are buying colour televisions, you know!' But it was totally the right thing to do."

Admittedly, Wilko's initial plan was to use a colour shot, but the striking monochrome images were an instant hit. Perhaps it was taken as an omen when, shortly after the colour prints were brought to Conway Studios where *Down By The Jetty* was being mixed, "Figure immediately spilled a cup of coffee over them," says Wilko. "Just straight away, he did it! It was awful. But it didn't matter, we'd already decided."

During an era in which some of the world's most successful recording artists were more inclined to sing about elves and the cosmos than herald their unglamorous local roots on the cover of their debut album, the Feelgoods' decision to present themselves as they did was refreshing, even if it wasn't entirely strategic.

"We didn't have a great deal to judge it by," admits Fenwick. "All we were anti was people prancing around with makeup on. We did believe the 'blues' dream a bit. We played that 'Canvey Island delta' thing consciously. It was an angle. We come from the Thames Delta, there's oil refineries, it's bluesy... And it had more of an edge to it than if the poor buggers had come from Swindon.

"We used that and it garnered interest. Journalists wanted to do interviews on Canvey Island. They could have done it at the record company over lunch but they wanted to experience Canvey." Once Chris had realised the extent to which the Feelgood brand of 'Canvey mystique' was capturing imaginations 'up west', there could only be one way to launch *Down By The Jetty*: "Bus 'em all down to Canvey, right? We became famous for the Feelgood launches, again, because we brought the journalists here for it.

"A good party can make a big difference. It's all to do with the product, of course, but people walk away with a grin on their face. You give them a bag with a pencil in it, they go, 'Er… lovely.' But if they've walked away saying, 'Fucking hell, that was great. Right, where's that record I've got to review?' Well, it's going to be a good review."

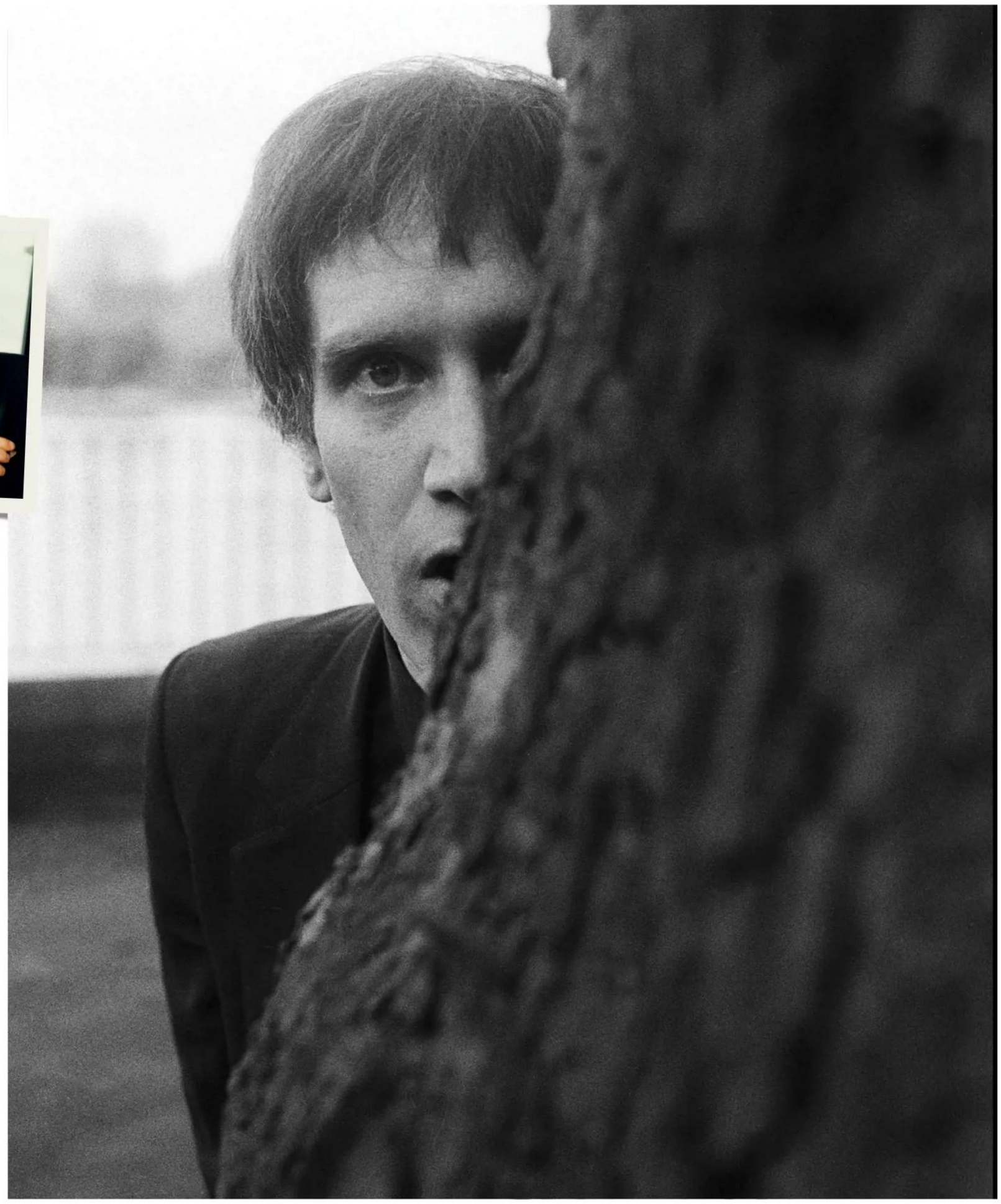
United Artists, again, had trusted the Feelgoods to do it their way and, again, their instinct was proven right. All they had to do was provide crates of tequila;

What They Said

How the Feelgoods' debut was received on its release.

NICK KENT
New Musical Express, January 25, 1975
BOYS, BOYS, now what did I tell you about being "too ethnic"? It's a depressing task, after months of raving, of sorties to pubs and clubs the length and breadth of London and of being party to that buzz which personified the Feelgoods, for every one of us who did all that raving and zipping around – to then turn around and have to say that the first record is just not that hot. *Down By The Jetty* is not the record we Feelgood fanatics had hoped for, or expected. It doesn't do the Feelgoods justice. The record hasn't taken into consideration the pacing, the dynamics at a Feelgood gig, or the way in which, live, the band bounces off from a set of high points. This band can muster a ferocity so devastating it grabs you by the lapels, pins you to the walls with its breath, and screams "This IS rock 'n' roll!" The Stones had it, the MC5 had it, and the Feelgoods have it within their grasp to define the full potency of rock 'n' roll, to crackle and spark, to push the godforsaken energy that powerhouses the beast to its limits. And it's not here. Not on this album. But we can wait.

ANDY CHILDS
ZigZag, July 1975
ROCK'N'ROLL LOUD, dirty, mean, raw, vicious rock 'n' roll. That's what Dr Feelgood are all about and they never make any pretensions to the contrary. But records are to be judged as records and not as substitutes for live gigs, and, in this respect, *Down By The Jetty* is a particularly fine debut. Curiously enough, it doesn't achieve any level of consistency, but the great moments (eg Wilko's slashing guitar-work on *The More I Give*) far outnumber the less memorable ones (eg Wilko's vocals on *That Ain't The Way To Behave*). The pace of the album is exhausting, slowing down once or twice, and then only for a few seconds before the sharp, jagged chords, and tough, lean vocals whip the next song along. *She Does It Right*, *The More I Give*, *I Don't Mind*, *Twenty Yards Behind*, *Keep It Out Of Sight*, and *Bonie Moronie/Tequila* (recorded 'live' at Dingwalls), are delivered with the sort of nervous energy that makes you realise how sloppy and untidy most established bands with similar roots really are. Despite that missing ingredient which manifests itself at great gigs but has yet to find its way on any rock 'n' roll record, *Down By The Jetty* is tight, disciplined, tense, inspiring, for which you must forget any preconceptions of what it should or could sound like, and be thankful it's available and awaiting your pleasure.



Tree's company: Dr Feelgood's Wilko Johnson.

whether this was a nod to the inclusion of *Tequila* on the album, or because it had become a favourite tipple of Lee Brilleaux's, is uncertain. But what was for sure was that they were "gargling the stuff by the pint," says Chris. "There's a Van Morrison song [*Saint Dominic's Preview*] in which he sings, *'The record company has paid out for the wine.'* Well, that became the catchphrase."

Hopped up on R&B (and the rest), lubricated within an inch of their lives and occasionally dropping their aitches in an attempt to fit in with their redoubtable hosts, the great and the good of the music industry finally wended their way back to London to file their euphoric reviews.

Down By The Jetty, with Wilko's stark, cutting guitar sound, Lee's scratched-up vocals and frenzied attacks on the gob-iron, and the power and precision of the rhythm section, would earn Dr Feelgood a gold disc, kick a drowsy music scene into touch and be roundly hailed as a classic. Like all great albums, *Down By The Jetty* has since taken on a very vibrant life of its own; it is still being written about and, more importantly, it is still being listened to and loved. As far as the Feelgoods are concerned, the following story is one of the compliments of which they're most proud.

"There was this party in a loft in Greenwich Village," explains Chris Fenwick. "Someone had flown in with the album and taken it along. At this party, there was Debbie Harry, Clem Burke, the Ramones, Richard Hell and the New York Dolls. Apparently *Down By The Jetty* was not off the turntable. This isn't folklore, it went down, and they were all driving into their careers at that point. Maybe they listened to it and thought, 'Right, I'm not making that mistake!' I don't know," he adds, laughing.

"It's nice to know it started a lot of good people on to a certain path," concludes Sparko. "I'm proud of that. But we didn't know it was going to be taken as well as it was, we were just making the record we wanted to make."

Zoë Howe is the author of a forthcoming Lee Brilleaux biography, and the co-author of 2012's Wilko Johnson: Looking Back At Me.

GETTY

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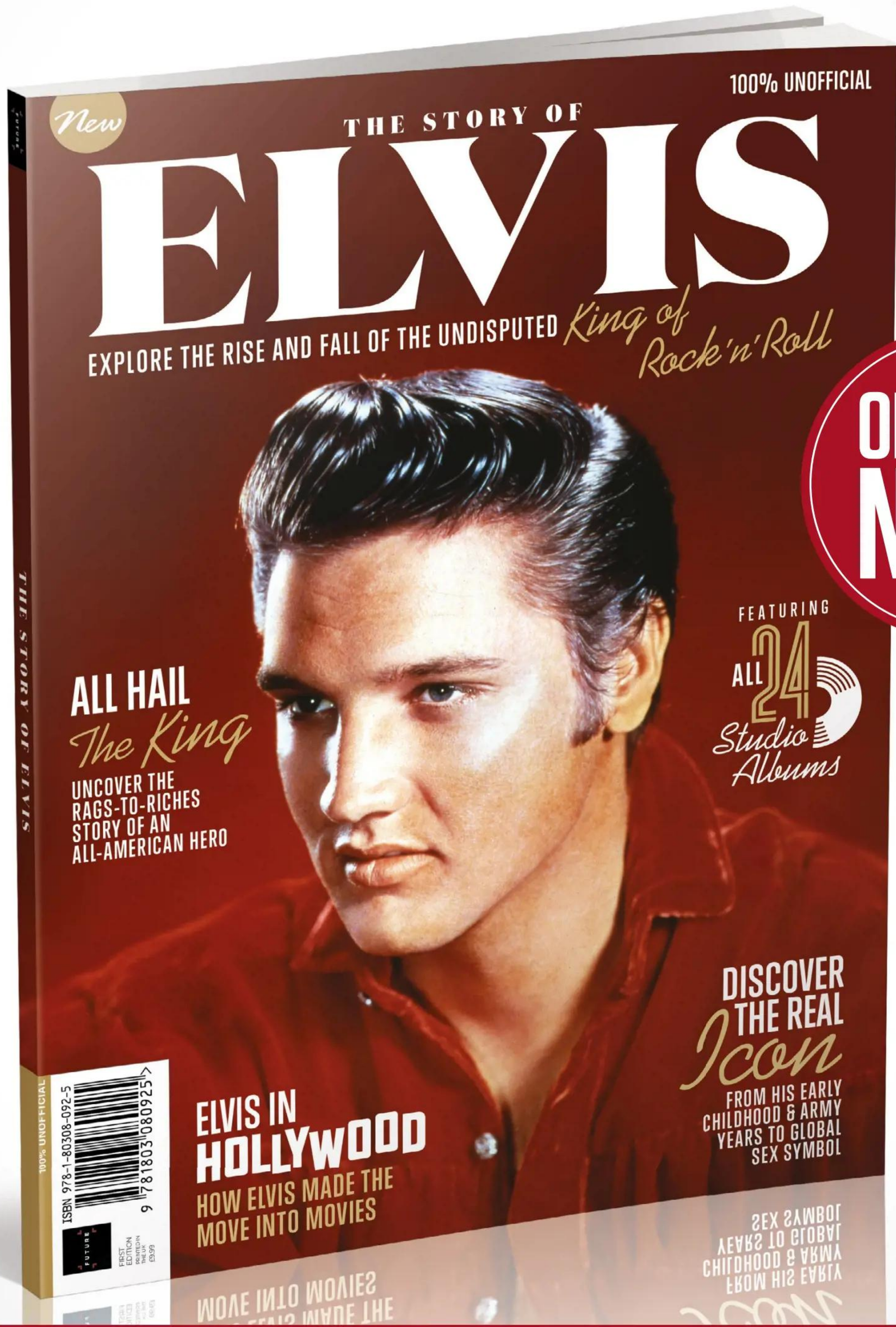

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

LIVIN' EVERY DAY

With his milestone career anniversary interrupted by a major health crisis, these are touch-and-go times for the legendary Walter Trout. Days before he entered hospital to await the transplant required to save his life, *The Blues* spoke to the man about his incredible past and painfully honest new album.

Words: **Henry Yates** Portrait: **Austin Hargrave**

It's the way he tells them. You might be interviewing Walter Trout in the coffee lounge of a Holiday Inn, or over a shaky Skype connection on a wet Tuesday, but when the veteran bandleader fires up an anecdote, rewinding to a pivotal scene in his own toe-curling biopic, he takes you along for the ride. Squalid 70s drug-dens. Murderous LA biker clubhouses. Clammy backstage orgies. You're right there with him, watching through your fingers.

Right now, *The Blues* is riding shotgun as Trout slips through another wormhole in the space-time continuum. The date is October 31, 1974, and the New Jersey bluesman has just arrived in California to seek his fortune. "I'd driven three thousand miles across the country in my VW Bug, camping in a pup tent, living on peanut butter and jelly," he begins. "When I got into Costa Mesa, my buddies were all going to a Halloween party. Well, I didn't have a costume, but they tell me they have this full-body gorilla suit that nobody is gonna wear. I figured, what the hell, y'know?

"So I put this gorilla suit on, with nothing underneath, then we all took a hit of LSD and we drove off to this Halloween party. Now, I had only been in California for five hours at this point. So I'm at this party and I start having what you'd call the quintessential bum trip. I'm thinking, 'I've made a big mistake. I gotta get in my car right now and drive back to Jersey.' I get more and more despondent until finally I just leave the party and start walking."

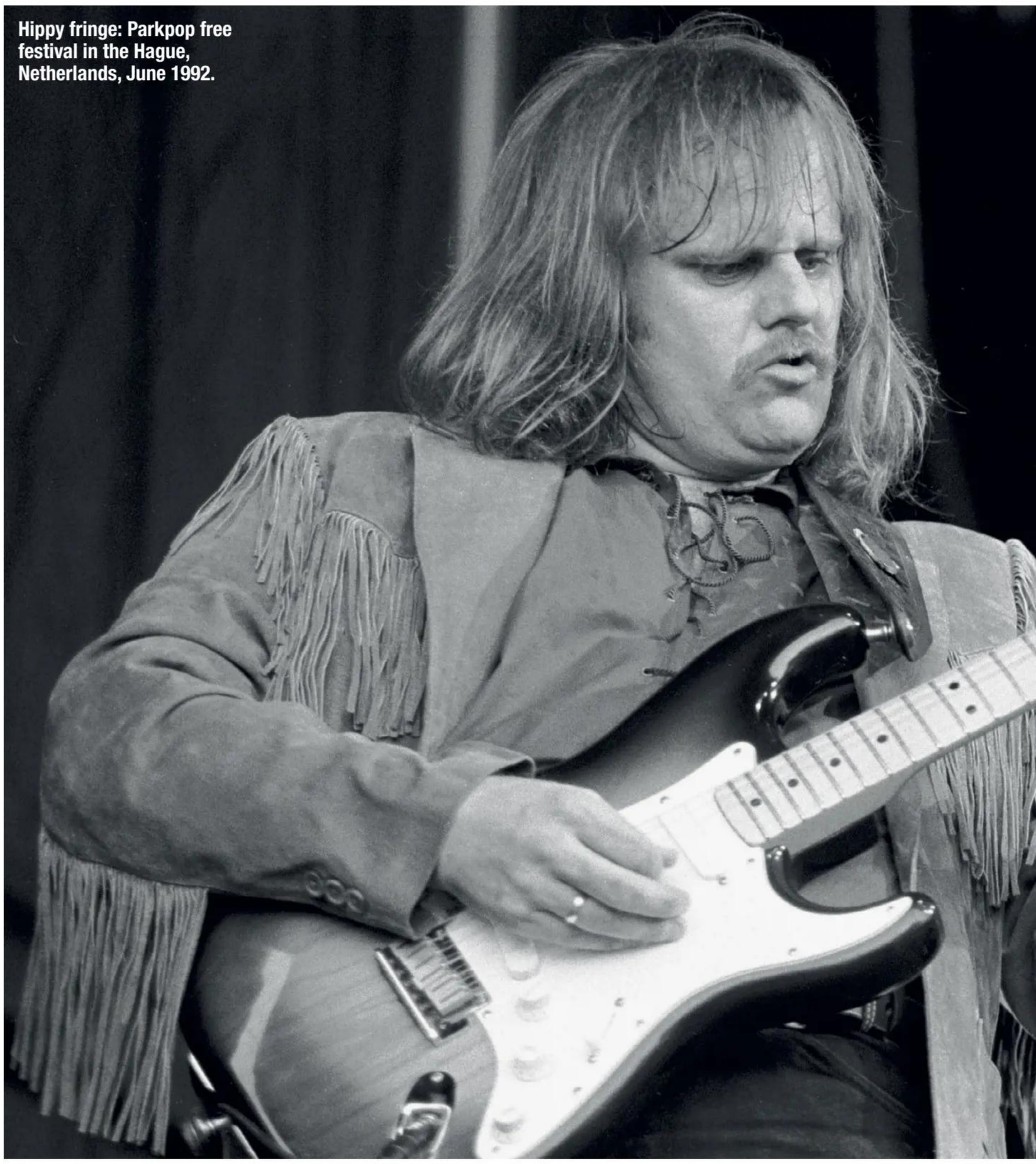
The punchline: "At which point, I realise I'm completely lost. I don't know where my friend's house is, or how to get back to the party. I have no money and I'm peaking on LSD. I came across this hamburger place called Bob's Big Boy. I walked in, sat down, took the gorilla head off, set it down on the counter and broke into sobbing uncontrollably. I told the waitress: 'I just got here, I'm on acid, I'm in a gorilla suit, I don't know where I am and I'm freaking out.' So she got me a cup of coffee and drew me a map. Turned out it was actually very easy; there were only two turns to make. So I walked back, in my suit, people pulling up next to me and yelling out of their cars. All I could think of the next day was, hopefully it's gonna be uphill from here…"

If you had kerb-crawled the tragic figure pounding the highway that night in 1974, it's unlikely you'd have bet on Trout surviving a month in the meat-grinder of the LA music industry, let alone toasting his 25th anniversary as a solo artist, as he does in 2014. The band leader's record label, Mascot, has certainly pushed the boat out, marking the quarter-century milestone with a fistful of commemorative releases, including reissues of 10 classic albums on premium 180-gram vinyl and a documentary directed by Frank Duijnisveld.

There's also *Rescued From Reality*: the official biography due next month, co-written by Trout and myself during a flurry of Skype interviews and one marathon face-to-face session in Cardiff. In the anecdote stakes, the gorilla suit is in pretty good company. There are bust-ups with Bruce Springsteen, Ike Turner and Albert King ("Albert tells me, 'The backstage toilet is for the headliner – get the fuck out of here!'"). There are death threats from Canned Heat's biker-gang management ("This large biker fellow tells us, 'I'm gonna personally murder each and every one of you!'"). Beatings from Buddy Rich. Dope-deals gone bad. Vagrancy. Cavity searches. In one particularly low ebb, Trout cooks up freebase in his own underpants. Without fear of arrogance – because it's his story, not mine – it makes Mötley Crüe's *The Dirt* look like *The Gruffalo*.

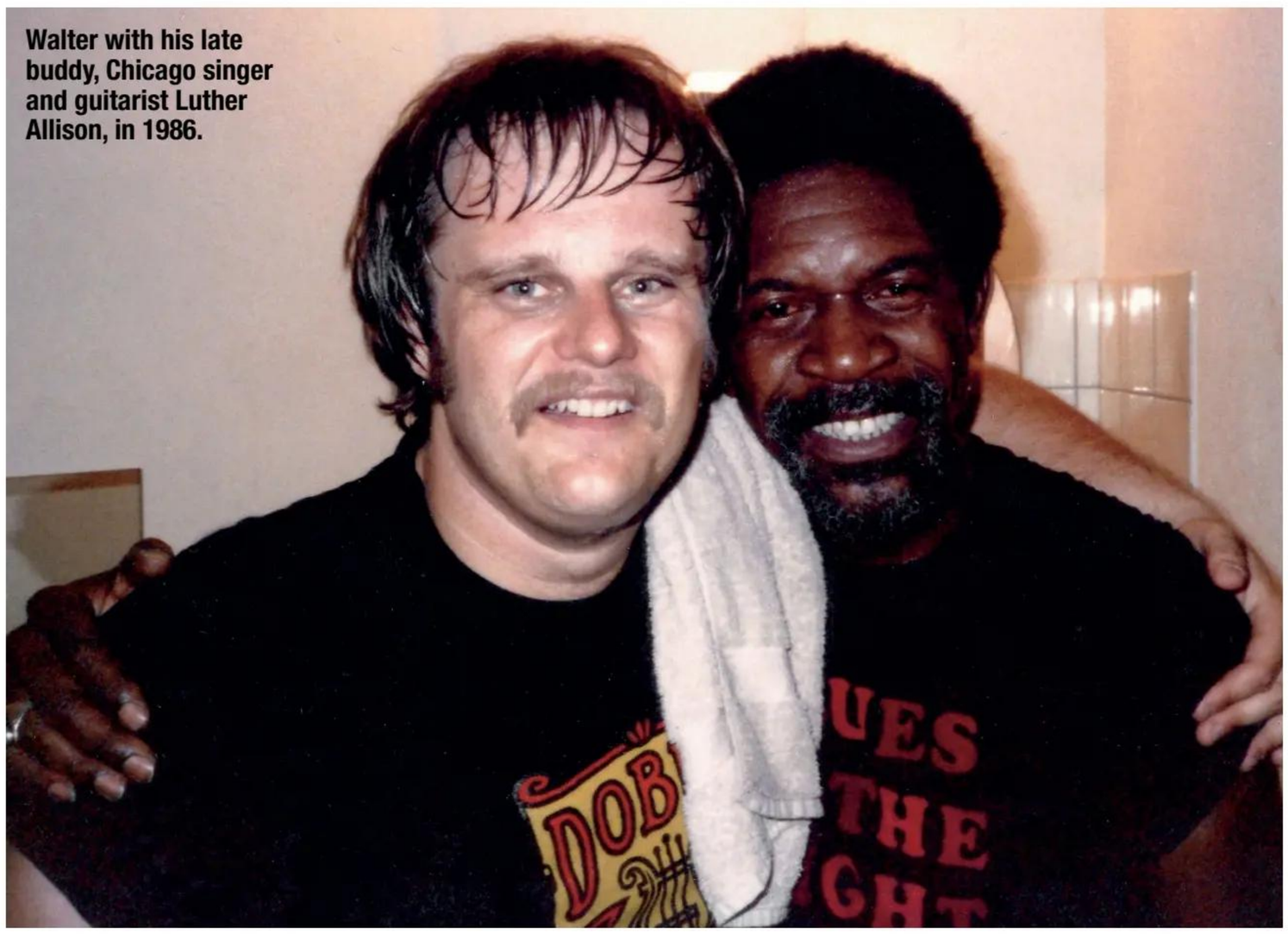
My own favourite episode finds the guitarist and his solo-period bassist Jimmy Trapp [who passed away in 2005] marooned in Ketchum, Idaho, circa 1977, having been blown out on a club residency. Without money or transport back to Cali, the pair are reduced to sleeping in cages at a local dog kennels. "These cages are three feet wide, maybe three feet tall," Trout reminds *The Blues*, "so you have to crawl in on your hands and knees. You're laying on concrete, surrounded by dogs, and they're barking and shitting all night. It was horrible. One night, after getting sick of all this, me and Jimmy went walking down the main drag of Ketchum, the yellow line between us, drinking a bottle of Jack, tripping on acid and swearing that we're not gonna let this get us down and we're gonna do something with music. When my wife read that part back to me, I just fell apart, because it brought back memories of my good buddy Jimmy, y'know?"

But enough of the sales pitch. For most fans, the pivotal release of Trout's anniversary year is *The Blues Came Callin'*. When sessions for this latest studio album began, back in April 2013, the guitarist had no particular concept or lyrical thread; he simply wanted to turn out another dazzling slab of blues-rock to maintain the velocity of 2012's *Blues For The Modern Daze*. Since then, life has changed beyond recognition, and the record's guiding theme alongside it. "I can't write bullshit," Trout shrugs, eyeing me steadily down the webcam from his home in California. "I have to be honest about what's going on. So this record became a whole different thing. There are songs on there that look square in the face at what's been happening to me."



Hippy fringe: Parkpop free festival in the Hague, Netherlands, June 1992.

"SO I PUT THIS GORILLA SUIT ON, NOTHING UNDERNEATH, THEN WE ALL TOOK A HIT OF LSD AND WE DROVE OFF TO THIS HALLOWEEN PARTY."



Walter with his late buddy, Chicago singer and guitarist Luther Allison, in 1986.

Most of our readers will hardly need reminding what that is. If you've taken even a cursory interest in blues-scene current affairs over the past nine months, you'll know this album arrives on the heels of the bluesman's darkest days, and that the 25th anniversary hoopla has suffered a desperate change to the script. "I wish the liver would have waited," Trout laughs, a little darkly. "Because I had this big year planned, with all these big tours, this and that…"

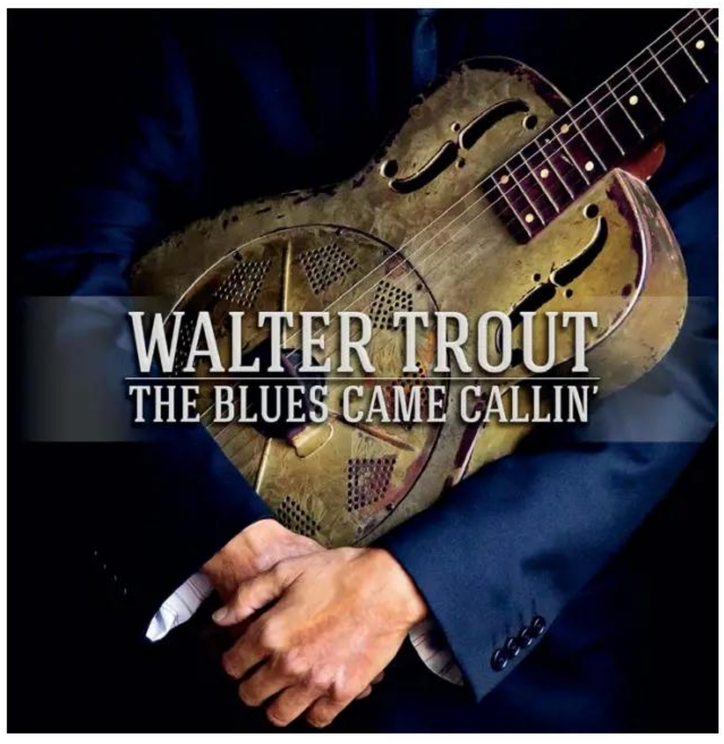
It all began last June. On tour in Germany, the guitarist awoke one night in his hotel room to find his legs bloated with fluid and "looking like telephone poles". He didn't panic, yet.

"It was obvious that something was up, but at that time, I had been getting some cramps, so I'd bought some magnesium pills. And being the guy I am in the book, where if one pill is good then 10 is better, I started mega-dosing on those. So when I woke up that night, I figured it was just a magnesium overdose. It was only when I got home that I found out it was cirrhosis of the liver."

When *The Blues* speaks to Trout in mid-March, despite experiencing drastic weight loss, huge discomfort and sporadic trips to hospital, it seems medication could halt the spread of cirrhosis. "I'm having some rough side effects," he tells us. "I don't think I've had a real night's sleep in months now. I lie in bed at night and my hand is flapping through the air and shit. It's completely out of my control. Just a few days ago, my wife Marie had to spoon-feed me. That, again, is a side effect from this drug that I'm on, and when it happens, I can't get the fork up to my mouth because my hand is shaking. It makes me itchy, too. And there's mood swings. When there's a commercial for McDonalds and they show a Big Mac and you start weeping, you know you're on the emotional edge."

Shortly after our interview, however, Trout's liver will fail, sending him into the intensive care unit at UCLA, where the diagnosis emerges in late-March that without a transplant he will not live beyond 90 days. An online fundraiser to pay his medical bills (organised by the family of Trout protégé Danny Bryant) blitzed its target of $125,000 in days and underlined the worldwide devotion the great man inspires, but as this issue of *The Blues* went to press, the agonising wait for a donor continues.

Right now, events are moving so fast that print media can't hope to keep up. All we can do is write this feature in the present tense, and pray this perennial survivor beats the odds, just as he has so many times before. "As evidenced by some of the stories in the book, I should have been dead years ago," admits Trout. "Y'know, I should have been dead when I was running around shooting heroin in the 70s with Jesse Ed Davis. I came so close to OD'ing on heroin and cocaine, many times. There were many times I'd take so much cocaine I was close to a heart attack. I feel like I was given a second chance back then. Then, with the drinking, a third chance. Just chance after chance. Now I gotta fight, and maybe I'll be given the next chance."



It's worth touching on the roots of Trout's alcoholism, if only to silence the pockets of chatroom trolls who have suggested that, as a hellraiser until the late-80s, he brought his liver troubles on himself. His stepfather was an alcoholic, he reminds *The Blues* today, whose mental health issues made for a deeply disturbed adolescence in New Jersey.

"I remember, one time, he chopped the bedroom door down with an axe, and my older brother had to hold him off with a shotgun. That was terror like I've never known. Even though my brother had a shotgun, his hands were shaking, because this guy was a six-foot-six ex-marine, and at the time my brother was only 15 or 16. We were both fucking terrified. It's hard to even describe it."

Alcohol, when it entered the frame, was never a hedonistic pleasure, but the best way for Trout to soften the trauma of those days. "I remember the first time I ever got drunk, and it wasn't fun," he says. "I was 15. After we had jammed, me and my friend, his parents went out and we got into their whisky cabinet. I ended up puking my guts out, coming home and puking all over the apartment, my mother running around after me with a bucket, cleaning up. It was horrible, actually. And there was a good period of time, between that experience and what I had seen the booze do to my stepfather, where I swore I would never drink. That fell by the wayside."

And how. "There was a good 10-year run," calculates Trout. "I was doing a lot of drinking in Canned Heat and in the early days with John Mayall. You know the Chateau Hibiscus story [each night Trout and Mayall would collect half-finished drinks from the venue in

GETTY

THE BLUES COLLECTION

Walter Trout: 'the world's greatest rock guitarist', says Whispering Bob Harris.

Giving it his all in Amsterdam, 2007.

"I'D DRINK ANYTHING. IT DIDN'T MATTER. I DIDN'T DRINK FOR TASTE. I DRANK TO GET FU(KED-UP. I THINK IT ALL TASTES LIKE LIGHTER FLUID."

a wine bottle labelled Chateau Hibiscus]. But along with the drinking went everything else. The one thing I did do was to get off the heroin in '77, and I've never done it again. So I guess I thought, y'know, I could drink and take cocaine until I'm half-dead, but at least I'm not on heroin. That was sort of the weird way I thought about things."

What would be a typical daily intake in the Bluesbreakers?

"Oh, I don't know. A fifth of Jack. When I first got in the Bluesbreakers, on the rider was a fifth of Jack Daniel's. Coco Montoya and I ended up having to amend that so that we each got our own fifth every night, because a fifth between the two of us was not enough. I mean, Coco even had a flight case for his guitar that had a cut-out for a fifth of Jack.

"I'd drink anything. It didn't matter. I didn't drink for taste. I drank to get fucked-up. All these ads about how good this or that liquor tastes? I think it all tastes like lighter fluid, and the reason you drink it is to get a buzz. I mean, who actually thinks whisky tastes good? It's like drinking rancid piss, even when it's the expensive kind. So I was not into it to savour the bouquet and all that bullshit. I wanted to get high, and I wanted to get high real quick. My alcohol consumption probably would have killed a horse, but I built up to it. Jimmy was the only one who could keep up, and I actually had a hard time keeping up with him. Jimmy was definitely leading the forefront, and I was his devoted disciple in the drinking world. We were the trailblazers, but he's dead now."

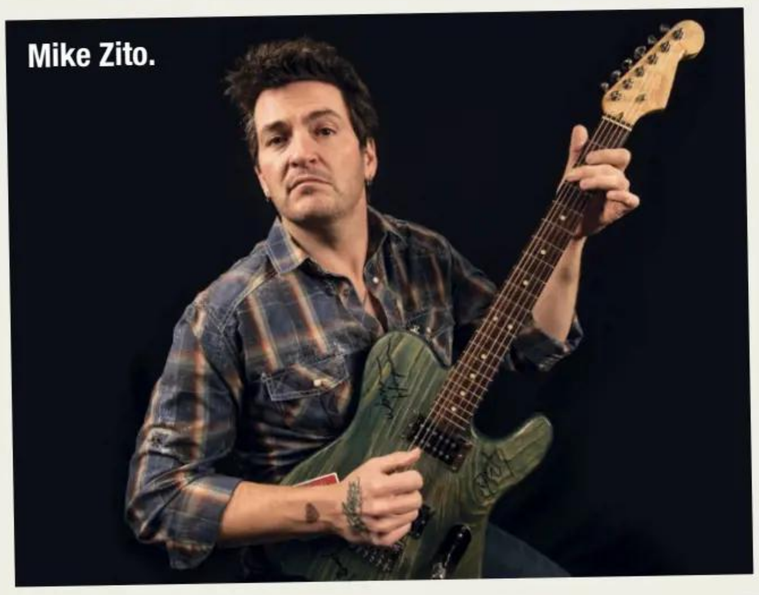
Did you like yourself when you were drinking? "Hell, no. Not at all. I didn't like myself for years."

Trout stopped everything for good on July 9, 1987. Given that, it seems massively unfair that his old habits should take their revenge now, but the guitarist has never shown a drop of self-pity in his interviews with me, vowing to fight on and keen to push ahead with release plans for *The Blues Came Callin'*. Patently, this is an album of which he's hugely proud, despite the bleak context that drove it. "I think the arts quite often work like that," he considers. "I went to this Beethoven exhibit that's in a museum out here in the States. They actually have this lock of his hair, and they did this DNA test on it, and they found out that this guy, not only is he deaf, but he's also got hepatitis, he's got cirrhosis of the liver, he's got kidney stones. Just imagine the pain the guy is in. Then he writes the Ninth Symphony. I mean, how the hell do you figure that out?"

The blues works that way too, we suggest. Beautiful music born of terrible times. Trout nods: "Those early blues guys had incredible lives, and that was one of the things that attracted me in the beginning. Y'know, the honesty, and the fact it seemed to me that the bluesmen were not concerned with demographics or buying trends or trying to put out the latest single or get airplay. They didn't give a shit about any of that. It was, 'I just want to play.' It was pure therapeutic music, those guys were doing. It was strictly to get it off their chest and to have some sort of release for that pent-up stuff."

The Blues Came Callin' has a similar sense of catharsis. But getting this material down wasn't easy, stresses Trout. "When I started this record back in April, I was still in good shape, liver-wise. Then my health fell apart over the summer. Every other CD I've done, I'll go in the studio and

PAUL BERGEN



Mike Zito.

'Walter told me to get my shit straight.'

Mike Zito writes movingly on the man he calls 'my hero, my mentor, my friend.'

"WALTER TROUT IS going to die." That's the news I got a month ago, if he doesn't get a liver transplant soon. I knew my friend was not doing well, he'd been losing weight over the past year and was not looking as healthy as he once was, but I just spoke with him a month or so ago and he was cracking jokes and being a wise ass. He told me he felt great, but his liver was really giving him a hard time. I guess I assumed he would get better, not worse. It was heartbreaking to see the thin-skinned, boney pictures of Walter on Facebook.

Walter Trout is my hero, he is my mentor, he is my friend. I have looked up to him for so long and suddenly he is in the wake of pain and suffering. I opened for Walter in St Louis for the first time in 1999 at Mississippi Nights. He told me I was good and I could open for him anytime. That was a huge shot to my ego. A few years later I showed up to open my sixth or seventh show with Walter and was really messed up on drugs and gave a poor performance. Walter sat me down after the show and chastised me. He told me exactly what Carlos Santana had told him years ago with John Mayall: "You're wasting your talent."

Walter told me I had a responsibility to the music, the fans and my family to get my shit straight and play the music honestly and from the heart. Walter was one of the first friends I called when I cleaned up and he told me he was there for me night or day. Walter Trout is a rebel, a maverick.

What I, and the legions of his adoring fans, hear is honesty. He is a poet. He sings from his soul, songs of love for his wife, hope for his children, and stands up for the common man. Walter Trout has purpose. His music speaks volumes. Walter puts more emotion into one note than most put into an entire album.

Reunited with his Bluesbreaker boss John Mayall at the Classic Rock Awards in London, 2013.

two weeks later, it's done. I bump 'em out in two weeks. Write them and record them. Not this one. It's been almost a year. There were many days that I would be sick and I would drive an hour-and-a-half to LA. I'd do about two hours in the studio then say, 'I can't do any more', turn around and drive home.

"I didn't want to play it half-assed. For me, it's gotta have the energy and it's gotta have the commitment, and as soon as I would feel like that was leaving and I was just going through the motions, I'd say, 'I gotta go.' That was frustrating. Very much so. I probably spent more time on the freeways than I actually spent in the studio.

"There were a few times I had to cancel sessions because I went in the hospital," he adds. "That happened a few times. It was day by day. One time, I almost died, because I had incredibly high potassium levels and incredibly low sodium levels, and they figured out that my brain was swelling and I was hours away from having a seizure. I ended up spending five days in the hospital with IVs pumping shit into me. I had sessions booked, but I had to say 'No, sorry, I can't come up and play the guitar or I'm gonna die.' Thank God for the studio owners, and thank God for [producer] Eric Corne, who worked with me and gave me that leeway."

They got there. *The Blues Came Callin'* will be released on June 2, and as Hugh Fielder's review affirms elsewhere in this issue, it's an absolute belter, albeit one that's frequently painful to listen to. "I've been waiting for somebody to hear it and give me some feedback," says Trout. "It's almost like you've given birth and you're waiting for somebody to say that your kid is nice-looking.

"THE BOTTOM OF THE RIVER IS PROBABLY ONE OF THE SONGS I'M MOST PROUD OF IN MY LIFE, LYRICALLY. IT'S ABOUT HITTING THE BOTTOM. WHICH IS EASY. IT'S GETTING YOUR WAY BACK UP THAT'S DIFFICULT."

Some of the songs on there are, to me, somewhat gut-wrenching lyrically. But I had to be honest. Y'know, there were times I'd read the lyrics to Marie and she'd go, 'You want to put that out there?' and I'd go, 'Yeah.' So she was way behind me on writing what I feel and what I'm going through. She knows that the music is therapeutic for me, and that I needed to do that."

It's not quite accurate to call *The Blues Came Callin'* a one-theme album. On *Take A Little Time*, for instance, Trout bemoans the frantic pace of modern LA life over a fabulous 50s rock'n'roll bedrock, while *Willie* takes a swipe at the various managers to have double-crossed him over the years. "I was ripe for the picking," he says of the latter. "All I wanted to do was play guitar, sing, write. I had no business acumen. I trusted everybody. All those guys that ripped me off, I thought were my friends. It was never the old cigar-smoking bald guy saying, 'I'm gonna make a star outta you, kid.' It wasn't that shit. They were all my peers, and they came off like they wanted to help me further my career, when in actuality, they just wanted to bleed me."

Yet there's no mistaking the thematic backbone that runs through this album. Musically and lyrically, opening track *Wastin' Away* sets the tone and the standard, fusing a Zep-worthy rock riff to Trout's ruminations on the face in the mirror, having lost almost half his body weight. "This album is a raw blues-rock record," he explains. "There are no gimmicks. I didn't want to throw in clever little breaks here and there. It's straight-ahead. With *Blues For The Modern Daze*, we had all the songs ready to go. But with this album, I'd be driving to the studio, thinking 'What the hell am I going to record?' I've got a little recorder on my phone, and I started singing the riff to *Wastin' Away*. Lyrically, that song was painful to write, but it was also very therapeutic. Music has always been a way for me to exorcise the demons."

Are you conscious of how much you've changed physically?

"Oh yeah. I'm very conscious of it. I mean, it's unbelievable. I'm skin and bones. I can feel bones in my shoulders and back that I didn't even know existed on the human body. Y'know, I can feel every joint. It's kinda amazing. It's almost like an anatomy lesson. I'm fighting it all the time. I just did 20 minutes on the recumbent bike."

You genuinely can't hear Trout's frailty in the guitar playing on this album: it's every bit as

searing and soul-drenched as we've come to expect. The vocal is another matter. At times, it's audibly parched and strained, but arguably all the more powerful for it. "Part of that is because it can be hard to get air," he explains, "but it's also that the diuretics they've had me on sorta dried out my throat. So when you hear me talking, my voice is different, and I can't really put my finger on why, but with some of those vocals, it was very difficult to get anything to come out at all. Y'know, I really had to push.

"At first, when I heard it back, I'd be sorta shocked. Then I'd think, 'It is what it is.' This is where I'm at right now in my life. This is what I'm able to do. I hope my fans out there who get this record will enjoy it, even though my voice on the Luther album sounds so different: big, full and boisterous, with a lot of vibrato and range. I don't have any of that right now. But I did my best to sing it like I mean it. And I think it gives it a little extra urgency, because I'm working so hard to get it to come out. It used to just be so simple…"

Scan through the lyric sheet and you'll find several lines that suggest Trout is fearful that his powers are fading. "To me," he says, "another of the most important songs on this record is the title track, *The Blues Came Callin'*. It didn't start like that, lyrically. At first, it was just gonna be a regular old blues song but, after what happened to me, I went back, changed the lyrics and resang it. That one is really gut-wrenching, but it's how I feel. There's a grand tradition of personifying the blues. Y'know, like Buddy Guy has an old song called *First Time I Met The Blues*. That's sorta what I tried to do.

"So that song is about me laying in bed, having this realisation that my whole life is changed and it won't ever be the same. I could get my health back, get a transplant and be doing good, but I'll never be the same guy. Even if I get optimum health, I'll never be the same guy up here."

Musically, at least, that title track brings back happy memories, with Trout calling on the Hammond skills of his one-time employer, John Mayall. "I said to John, 'You know what? I'd love to hear you play B3. You played it on the Beano album, but ever since then, the whole time I was with you, you used this shitty little synthesiser that sounds real cheesy.' John said, 'I don't know if I remember how.' But he went out and played for about five seconds, then we recorded that song. It was live, one-take, no discussion."

There's also *Mayall's Piano Boogie*, which does what it says on the tin. "Recording that was a blast, man," remembers Trout. "With that one, I said to him, 'John, I want you to do something else that you've not done on record for a long time. I've heard you play boogie-woogie piano, and I think you're really good at it, but the last time you recorded a boogie-woogie song was in 1970.' They have this beautiful Steinway piano in this studio and John just walked over and started playing it. I looked over at Eric, and Eric ran over and hit the record button, and the rest of us just kinda stumbled into the studio and joined in. John didn't even say, 'Okay, are we ready?' He just went for it. Like, 'you'd better get this now, because here it is.' It kinda cracked me up. We had to figure out what key he was in."

Mayall was your rock and confidant in the depths of the drinking years. Has he given you any advice in your current situation?

"Not really. At the Classic Rock Awards in November, he did really take of me. He and

Brave face: Walter's latest album took a year to record, in between hospital visits.

WILL IRELAND, JEFF KATZ

Reality bites

The Blues grills Henry Yates, the author of Walter Trout's white-knuckle biography.

So what's Walter really like?

I must have interviewed more than a thousand musicians, and I've never met anyone cooler, wittier, kinder or more charismatic than Walter. He's like a stand-up comedian spliced with a philosopher: one minute he's telling you a filthy joke, the next he's discussing the endgame of the American Civil War. He's seriously intelligent and well-read but equally bawdy and irreverent. I can see why all the young bluesmen worship him. He'd have made a great teacher, but I'm glad he chose music.

What were the challenges of writing *Rescued From Reality*?

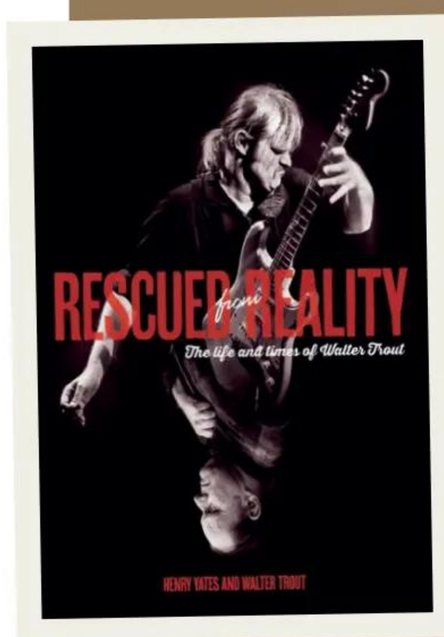
Certain areas of Walter's life are desperately traumatic, and I knew those sessions would hurt. Walter broke down several times – particularly when recalling the violence of his childhood – but he always picked himself up and carried on. The biggest challenge was when his illness set in. It's hugely poignant to write someone's life story when their life is in jeopardy. Like the warhorse he is, Walter kept going, fitting sessions around hospital treatment. His amazing wife, Marie, told me he found the book a welcome distraction – it meant a lot to hear that.

How did the process work?

Like all the best rock stars, Walter gets up late: his body-clock is always on touring time. So he'd generally Skype me at noon, California time, and we'd go for an hour each time. We also met up in Cardiff for an all-day session last May, just before his health problems began. Interviews with musicians can be like pulling teeth, but once Walter trusts you, he gives you the kind of solid-gold material that us hacks dream of.

What's your favourite Trout anecdote?

How Walter dodged the Vietnam war by taking a daily hit of LSD and refusing to wash for a fortnight before his appointment at the draft board. But it's hard to choose a favourite. Walter has lived the kind of swashbuckling, death-dicing, hell-and-back existence that beggars belief. I'm just surprised nobody has written this book before.



An online campaign by fans and fellow musicians raised $125,000 to pay Walter's medical bills.

"MUSIC LIFTS ME. IT NOURISHES MY HEART AND SOUL. IT GIVES ME PURPOSE. IT PUTS ME BACK IN TOUCH WITH THE REASON THAT I'M HERE."

Marie shepherded me around. He was very concerned for me – I could tell – but he also had some points to make. There was one part where there was a long flight of stairs we had to go up, and John's like, 'Do you want to take the elevator?' I said, 'John, I'm gonna try these stairs.' So he got in front of me – 80 years old – and he sprinted up this long flight of stairs, three at a time. He got up to the top, folded his arms, stood there and waited for me, because I'd take about five steps and have to stop and breathe. But he was just looking at me, like, 'Boy, you have fucked yourself up, Walter…'"

More metaphorically, the long climb back to health is a theme explored on perhaps the album's best track, *The Bottom Of The River*. "That's probably one of the songs I'm most proud of in my life, lyrically," says Trout. "That's a song about hitting the bottom. And hitting the bottom is easy. It's getting your way back up that's difficult. The guy in the song falls in the river. He gets pulled to the bottom. The current drags him and holds him. So he has to make the decision that he's going to fight and that he's going to live. This guy, he has to summon all the strength that's in him. He doesn't think he has the strength to make it. But then he realises what he has to live for. He sees his life, and he realises that he wants more. He finds the strength, fights with everything he has and gets back to the surface.

"And at that point, he looks around and he sees beauty in the world he never saw before, or he took for granted. I go through that, too, every day. We have a lot of crows around here, and I have this beautiful little back patio, right in the sun. It's quiet and you can sit out there and hear the waves break. I used to go out there, but then these crows would get on the trellis above me and start screaming at each other, in crow talk. They're all pissed off, right? Before, I'd be like, 'Hey, you're disturbing my peace!' and I'd start yelling at them. Now, when they come and they start doing that, I think it's the most beautiful thing I ever heard in my life. I just have a different view of things."

Trout will tell you all about his renewed appreciation: for nature, for mankind, for life. Music, above all, has never sounded sweeter to him than it does right now, nor provided a more tangible lifeline. It's truly heartening to see his eyes sparkle when he recalls the creation of this new album, or reflects on the shows of late 2013, when the energy from the audience visibly eased his condition. Alongside the love of his family, it's music that has made these times bearable, and God willing, it's music that will be waiting for him when he returns to health.

"Music lifts me," Trout agrees. "It nourishes my heart and soul. It gives me purpose. My wife and children are obviously a huge purpose, but to keep making music that might mean something to somebody… y'know, it puts me back in touch with the reason that I'm here."

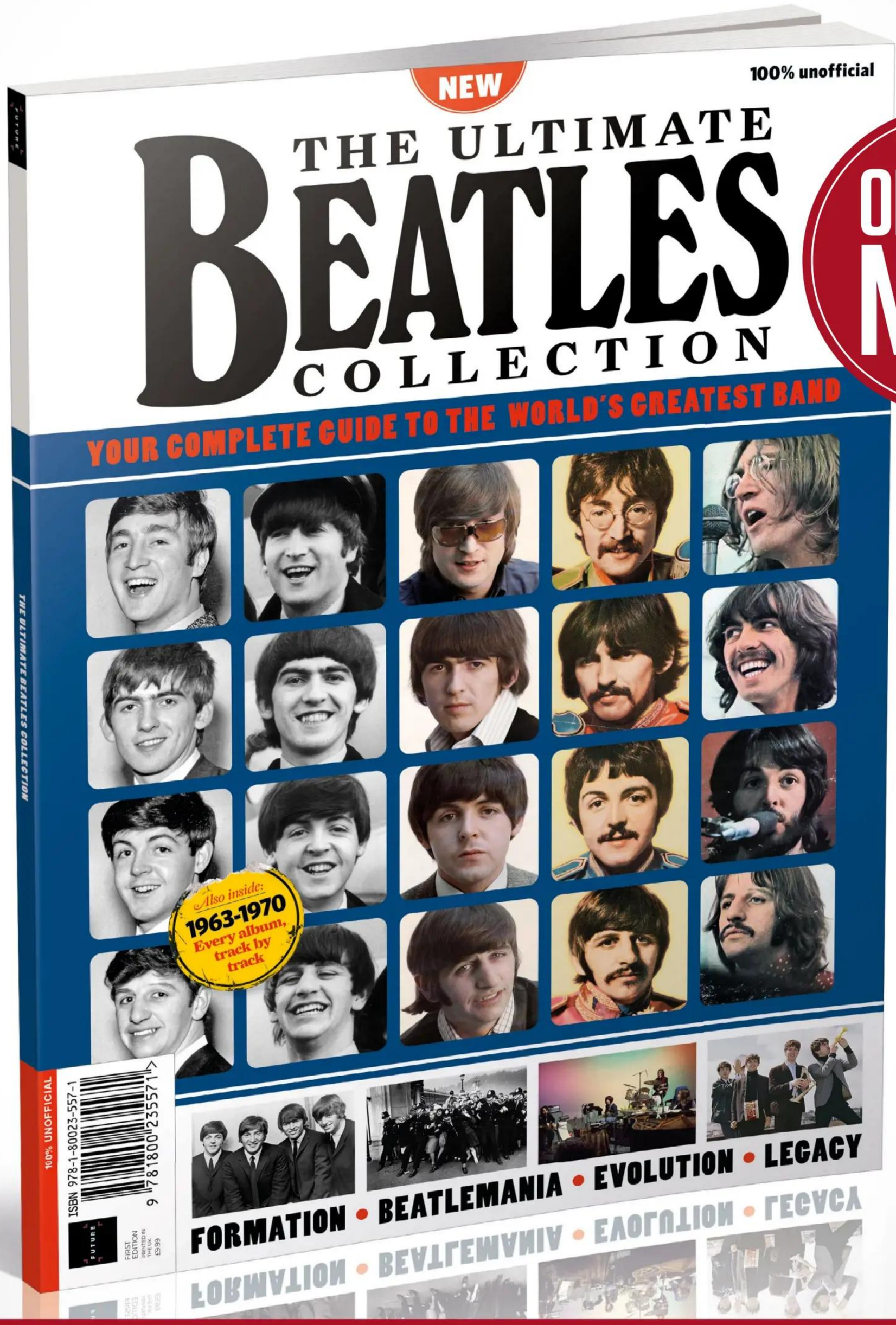
This feature was first published in The Blues magazine in 2014.

Rescued From Reality: The Life And Times Of Walter Trout by Henry Yates and Walter Trout is available now, published by Mascot Provogue.

PAUL BERGEN

DISCOVER HOW JOHN, PAUL, GEORGE AND RINGO CHANGED MUSIC FOREVER

In The Ultimate Beatles Collection, we chart the Fab Four's musical evolution through the Sixties, see how Beatlemania swept the world, and explore the true extent of the band's unmatched legacy.



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Stop messin' around

GARY MOORE's 1990 album *Still Got The Blues* was an abrupt and risky game-changer, bringing him unprecedented success, setting him on course for the rest of his career – and reigniting the tradition of blistering British blues guitar.

Words: **Harry Shapiro**

Spring 1989. Gary Moore was touring across Europe promoting his latest album *After The War*, his fifth rock album for Virgin since *Corridors of Power* in 1982. Sales and profile were growing with each album, culminating in *Wild Frontier*, which spawned the hit single *Out in the Fields* with Phil Lynott – top five in the UK in 1985 and higher still across Europe. But the new album hadn't done so well and Gary was tiring of the 1980s rock treadmill; the emphasis on soulless fret-melting guitar, big hair and looking serious in daft pop videos. He realised, too, that he was repeating himself as a songwriter. He needed to take some risks if he was to move on – but which way to turn?

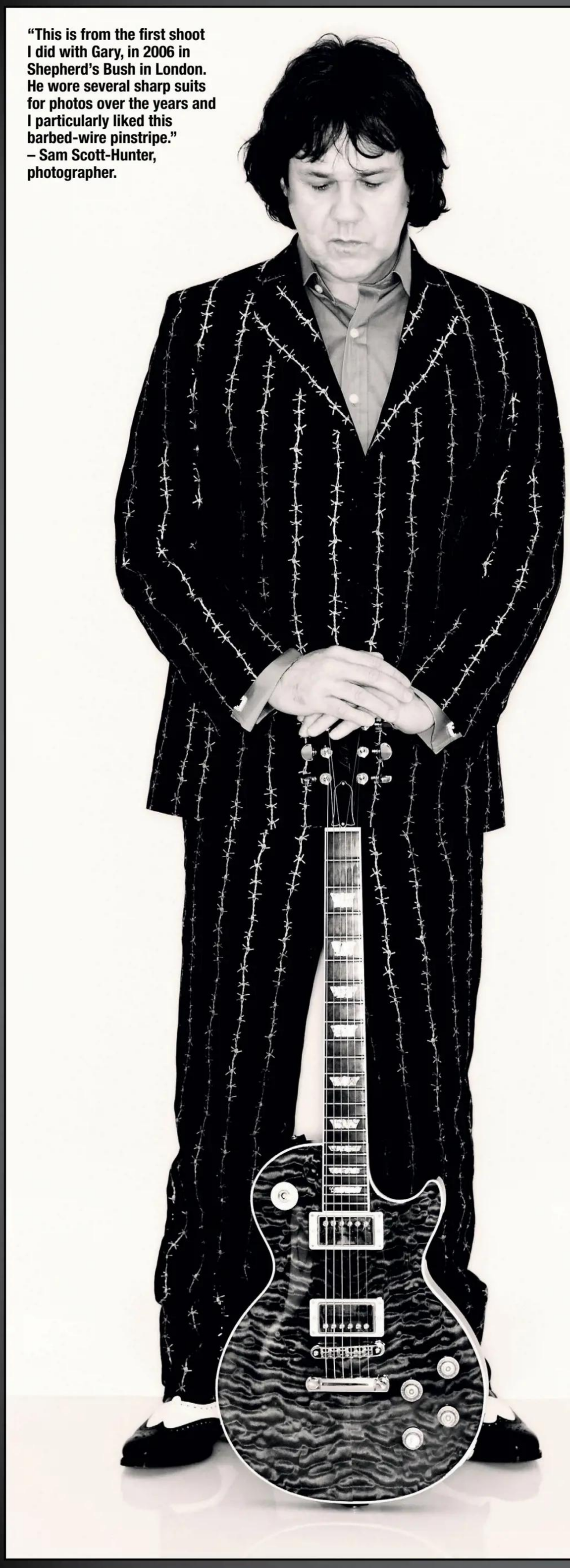
Sitting in the tune-up room loosening up before a gig in Germany with his long-time bass player Bob Daisley (ex-Rainbow and Ozzy Osbourne), the answer came. "We were messing about playing bits and pieces of blues," says Daisley. "Stuff from the Bluesbreakers' *Beano* album. And then it came to me. I said to Gary, 'Why don't we do a blues album?'"

Flashback to Belfast 1966; Gary Moore, then still only 14, had been making a name for himself as a guitar prodigy on the Belfast beat scene. Starting around the age of 10 with a jumbo acoustic almost as big as himself, he progressed so far over the next four years that he was the proud owner of a white Telecaster – one of the very few available in

> **The *Beano* album was an unbelievable epiphany, it changed my life in a second.**

SAM SCOTT HUNTER

King of the wild frontier: Gary Moore from the shoot for *Close As You Get*, 2007.



“This is from the first shoot I did with Gary, in 2006 in Shepherd’s Bush in London. He wore several sharp suits for photos over the years and I particularly liked this barbed-wire pinstripe.” – Sam Scott-Hunter, photographer.

Blues for Greeny: Peter Green and his ‘magical’ ’59 Les Paul.

the city and bought on hire purchase by his dad for 180 guineas (an eye-watering £2800 at 2013 prices).

He’d been playing pop covers since his first band The Beat Boys, but then in July 1966, the *Beano* album came out; “I remember going round to a friend’s house one Sunday afternoon. I’ll never forget it because it was such a big thing for me. He had the album and a lot of people were talking about it. It was the first time anyone had heard a Les Paul going through a Marshall amp. My friend put on the opening track, *All Your Love,* and it changed my life in a second, it was an unbelievable epiphany. It was only a little stereo, but the guitar was screaming out of the speakers. I’d never heard a guitar sound so big and so passionate, and so full of energy and emotion.”

Moore borrowed the album and never gave it back. That very same copy with the name ‘G. McFarlane’ written in the top left-hand corner now resides in Belfast’s Oh Yeah community centre, alongside a display of stage clothes and a black Les Paul.

It wasn’t that long after hearing the album that Moore ran away from home, travelling to Dublin with The Method as a stand-in for the guitarist who had hurt his hand in a car accident and then joining Skid Row, featuring a tall, skinny black kid called Phil Lynott on vocals. If hearing Eric Clapton was an epiphany, the next step in Moore’s blues journey became a lifelong obsession.

Moore first clapped eyes on Peter Green in 1967, when Fleetwood Mac played the Club Rado in Belfast. Like most fans, he stood there, arms folded, waiting to hear from the guitarist who had the job of replacing Eric Clapton. Moore said later, “From the opening licks of *All Your Love* it was obvious that here was someone very special. As for his guitar sound, I’d never heard anything like it in my life. It seemed that the whole room was resonating, such was the depth of his tone.”

SAM SCOTT HUNTER/GETTY

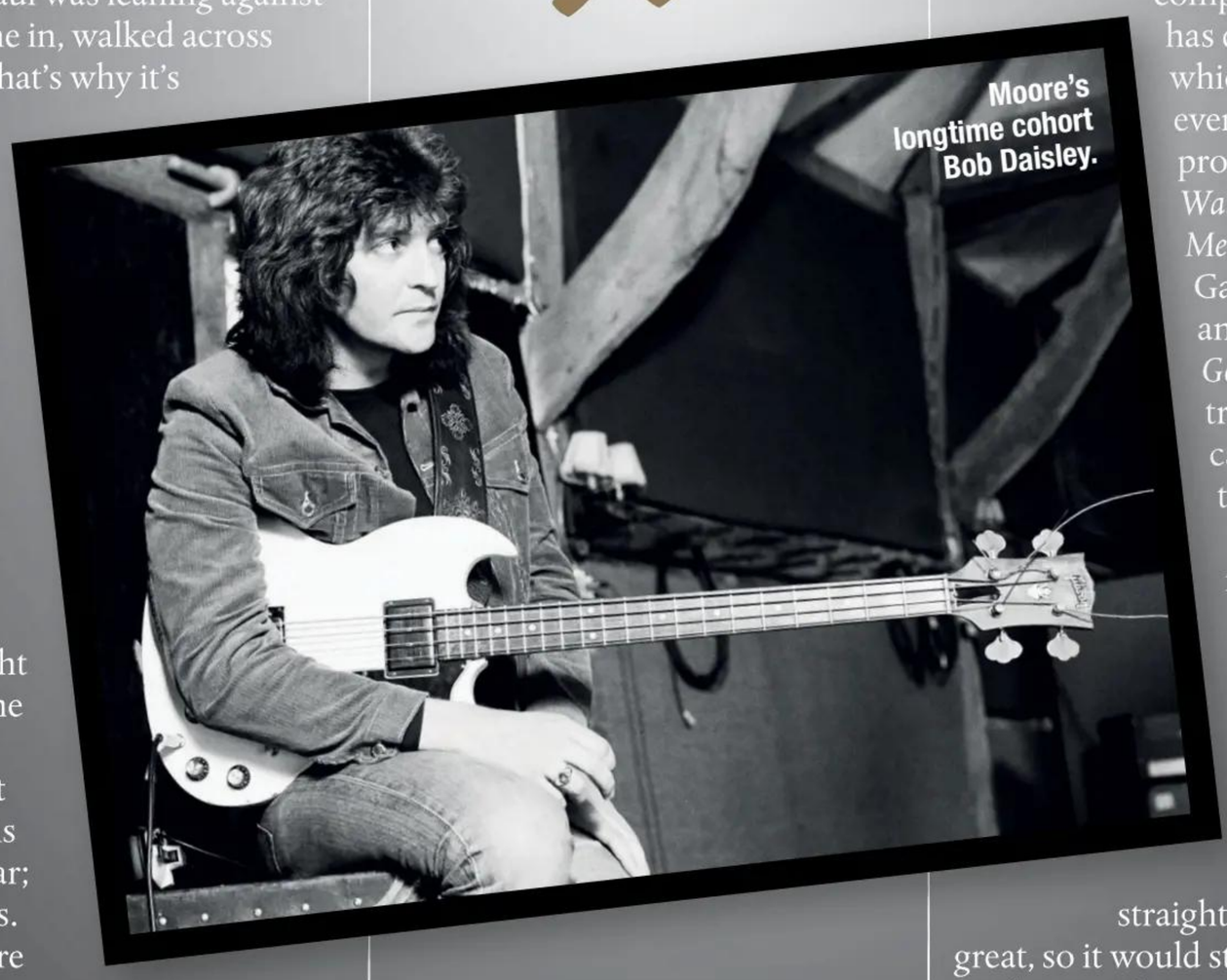
That guitar, a 1959 Les Paul Standard, would become as much a part of the Gary Moore story as it was embedded in the legend of Peter Green.

Moore didn't meet Green until January 1970, when Skid Row supported Fleetwood Mac at Dublin's National Stadium. "After we'd played our set, a local DJ, Pat Egan, who was compering the show, came up to me and said Peter wanted to say hello. Peter told me that he liked my playing and invited me back to his hotel after the show. I had another gig to play about 50 miles away, but he wanted me to go back and we sat up playing and talking until the early hours. After that we became friends and he persuaded his manager Clifford Davis to sign Skid Row."

Skid Row moved to London, where Moore and Green stayed in touch. By then, Green's life was unravelling; he left Fleetwood Mac, began to offload money and possessions and started down an awful slope into mental illness and obscurity. Moore recalled a particular night at The Marquee: "Peter asked me if I wanted to borrow his guitar. All through the Bluesbreakers and Fleetwood Mac he had played that particular guitar… and so I jumped at the chance. A few days later he called and asked me if I wanted it. I told him there was no way I could afford it, but he said if I sold my main guitar (a Gibson SG), then whatever I got for it, I could give it to him and then it would be like swapping guitars. It's the best guitar I have ever played…it has a magic all its own and a sound that I have never heard from any other guitar."

Moore spent the mid to late 70s alternating between the hard rock of Thin Lizzy and the prog rock complexities of Colosseum II. He met up with Green again during the recording of his solo album *Back On The Streets*, the source of his first pop success, *Parisienne Walkways*. Gary told *Guitarist* magazine in 2003, "He was downstairs in the bar and I said, 'Come up. I want to play you this track'. We'd done this slow version of *Don't Believe A Word* which was very much in the Fleetwood Mac style. The Les Paul was leaning against a chair in the studio and he came in, walked across and brushed it with his hand. That's why it's given me another 20 years of magic ever since. He put some of the old magic back into it for me."

"Peter Green's Les Paul is the best guitar I have ever played."


Moore's longtime cohort Bob Daisley.

GETTY

What is so special about that guitar is a matter of dispute. There are many stories of how it came to have that soulful, far away, out-of-phase signature sound. Inevitably the truth is probably a mash-up of explanations – the main ones being a botched repair at Selmer's, where Peter had bought the guitar second hand feeling he should have the same guitar as Eric, and a possible factory fault unique to this guitar. But there is no such thing as a magical guitar; there are only magical guitarists. One thing's for sure, Gary Moore was a worthy recipient of the most famous Les Paul on the planet. He used it on *Still Got The Blues* and the subsequent tour – and dedicated the album to Peter Green.

But in 1989, exactly what form this blues album would take – or even if it would happen at all – was very much up in the air. When Bob Daisley said "why don't we do a blues album?" – he meant Gary's touring band of the moment, with keyboard player Neil Carter and drummer Chris Slade. But Carter wasn't really into playing blues and, shortly after the tour ended, Chris Slade joined AC/DC. And Moore had other ideas.

The prospect of doing a blues album was raised with the record company by Moore's manager Steve Barnett. According to John Wooler, part of Virgin Records A&R team, a very early thought was to make a Fleetwood Mac concept album using Blue Horizon producer Mike Vernon and trying to get some of the original band to play. But Moore soon ditched that plan and turned his mind to building a team of musicians under his own name. Graham Lilley, Gary's then guitar technician, recalls conversations about including another guitarist in the line-up, with Snowy White's name being mentioned.

Inside Virgin, the conversation initially focused on this being a side project – in other words, not an album that would count as part of Gary's contracted commitments.

Briefly floated, too, was the notion that this could be released on the Point Blank label. John Wooler, who had good connections with a number of American blues artists on the Alligator label, was laying plans to have a blues subsidiary of Virgin. Nothing was going to happen, however, until Virgin could hear what Moore was planning.

Moore reached out first to bassist Andy Pyle, who he had played with back in 1980, in a short-lived band that recorded a live album at The Marquee. Moreover, Pyle had solid blues credentials with several bands, including Savoy Brown and Blodwyn Pig. Moore and Pyle met and started working on some ideas. Activity then shifted to a small studio in a converted barn in Woodcray, Berkshire, not far from Gary's home in Henley. Andy brought in ex-Blodwyn Pig drummer Clive Bunker, and when that didn't work out, turned to Graham Walker, who was not specifically a blues drummer, but somebody who could be relied upon to play in the simple, uncomplicated way that Gary would be looking for. The original demo band was completed by pianist Mick Weaver. Time has dimmed the memory of exactly which tracks they tried out and eventually played to Virgin, but probably *Oh Pretty Woman, Moving On, Walking By Myself, Midnight Blues, Stop Messin' Around*, a Fleetwood Mac track Gary later recorded with Phil Lynott, and possibly an early version of *Still Got The Blues*. Some of those basic tracks were so well developed, they can be heard pretty much intact on the final release.

After some polishing and refinements, Steve Barnett took the demos to Virgin.

"People reacted really well inside Virgin to some of the more commercial songs," says Wooler. "People who were not blues fans, and they thought maybe this had got greater potential than just a straight-up blues record. The playing was great, so it would still appeal to the guitar fans and might appeal to a wider audience because the songs were so melodic." Virgin then decided that this was no side project, this was going to be the next contracted Gary Moore album with the full backing of the record company and a budget to match.

Rehearsals began in earnest at John Henry's in north London. Wooler oversaw the project and Moore co-producing with Ian Taylor, who had engineered *After The War*. As well as Pyle and Graham

Walker, Moore decided to try out other rhythm section combinations. So in came Bob Daisley to play with Moore's long-standing friend Brian Downey from Thin Lizzy. Keyboard player Don Airey had known Moore from back when they both played in Colosseum II. As the work progressed through November and December 1989, it was decided to add a horn section to give it that Albert/B.B. King, big-band vibe and also to add strings. Moore could hear the arrangements in his head, but he couldn't write music, so Airey wrote the scores and worked with the horns and string sections. When Airey told guitarist Mick Grabham, who lived in the same village, what he was doing, Grabham dumped a load of Albert King albums in his lap, saying, 'you'd better listen to this lot'. During rehearsals, even Jack Bruce came down to jam just to help Moore gain a sense of how he wanted the album to shape up.

Once rehearsals were over, the main recording sessions began at Sarm West, the old Island Recording Studio in central London. It wasn't the cheapest but, as Ian Taylor explains, "We didn't book much time. The philosophy was going to be that the whole album would be done in a few weeks, not months, plus two or three weeks to mix. And we wanted to get a live feeling from the band, getting people together to get some chemistry, rather than stripping it all down and doing lot of overdubs."

For this to work, it needed studio discipline and Gary had that by the bucketload. It was almost like a day at the office, rather than people 'hanging out' getting wasted and doing nothing. Moore needed people around him who knew exactly what was expected of them and were ready to go when he was.

Says Ian Taylor, "Gary liked working with me because I could get his guitar sounding good. I knew where he wanted the guitar in the mix and I made his life in the studio as easy as possible. It allowed him to go in the studio and not have a lot of fucking about. So Gary arrives, everybody is there and ready, right let's go. When he had the guitar in his hand, he was a slightly different person. He would come into the studio very relaxed, but as soon as he put that guitar on, everything had to happen or the moment was lost. So everybody had to be with Gary and I could make that happen."

> **"Gary was a very tough critic of his own playing."**

From Taylor's point of view, "Andy and Graham were perfect for Gary because it was really all about Gary and his guitar, so he didn't want any 'surprises' from his backing band. He wanted the landscape clear so he could do exactly what he wanted. He didn't want to hear that the bass player had put a funny note in there. Or the drummer had suddenly done a drum fill when he wasn't expecting one. With Bob (Daisley) and Brian (Downey) Gary wanted a different feel, but also to bring in guys he had played with before, who were mates. Bob Daisley was the one guy who could make Gary laugh all time. He was a continual one-liner guy."

It is remarkable, then, that *Still Got The Blues* was done in one take. Moore recalled later, "I remember exactly when we recorded [that track]. I was in a very determined frame of mind. I was up for the whole thing. I had the sound of the guitar in my mind and I really got it sounding the way I wanted, got the right balance in the headphones and just went for it… we were all so comfortable together, we just played, nobody make any mistakes. That was it, it all came together." To which Taylor adds, "Gary had perfect pitch, so we dropped in two notes where the tuning wasn't spot on. That was such a small amount to fix. Gary was a very tough critic of his own playing."

Everything that Gary loved about the early style of

Moore with Scott Gorham in Thin Lizzy.

GETTY

Clapton and Green, he brought to his own playing; passion, emotion, energy and the most sublime of tones and touches. The solo on the track *Still Got The Blues* is almost symphonic in its construction and was typical of Gary's playing at its very best. He brought rock aggression to blues playing and his blood is running through those strings. On this track, as on so much of his work, Gary Moore played as if his life depended on it, as if each note would be his last.

As well as using solid British musicians, the talk was of maybe bringing in some of the real deal blues legends from America. Over to John Wooler: "We had been at the rehearsal studios and I was giving Gary and Steve (Barnett) a lift back. We were talking in the car and I said, 'Have you heard of Albert Collins? I'll play you a great track. You'll love his guitar playing.' I played him *Too Tired* and Gary said, 'That's incredible. Never heard of this guy in my life.' So I made a tape up for Gary. I had already been talking to Albert about being the first artist on Point Blank, so I said it would be great to get him on the record."

Albert Collins came in and they got *Too Tired* down in three takes.

"Gary wanted to do Albert King's *Oh Pretty Woman,*" says Wooler, "so he asked me if I could track him down. I ended up talking to Albert's lawyer in Arkansas and we eventually worked out a deal.

"I had to meet Albert at Heathrow airport (where he'd been flown over first class), pick him up that night, take him to the hotel and the next day we were going to do the recording. So I'm down at the airport – no sign of Albert King. In the morning, I get this call, 'Where are you Albert?' 'I'm at the hotel'. He'd got a different flight, but didn't think to tell me. So it's 10am and he wants me to pick him up so we can start recording straight away. Gary would usually come in about two. So I'm frantically trying to call Gary and Steve to say that Albert's ready to go and he doesn't want to hang around. I tried to delay things by taking him to breakfast. Albert's track was due to be recorded at Metropolis studio in Chiswick, west London. Gary got there early and we cut the session around midday. For Albert, it was all about getting down to the studio, doing the song and going home."

But he still had time to tell Moore off for misquoting the lyrics to *Oh Pretty Woman* and also freaked everybody out by tipping a load of bullets on the table in search of his pipe-cleaning knife. Turned out that back in his home town of Memphis, Albert was an honorary sheriff – and he produced the badge to prove it. It may also have been a subtle way of saying that at, 6 feet 4 inches and nearly 18 stones, you didn't mess with Albert King.

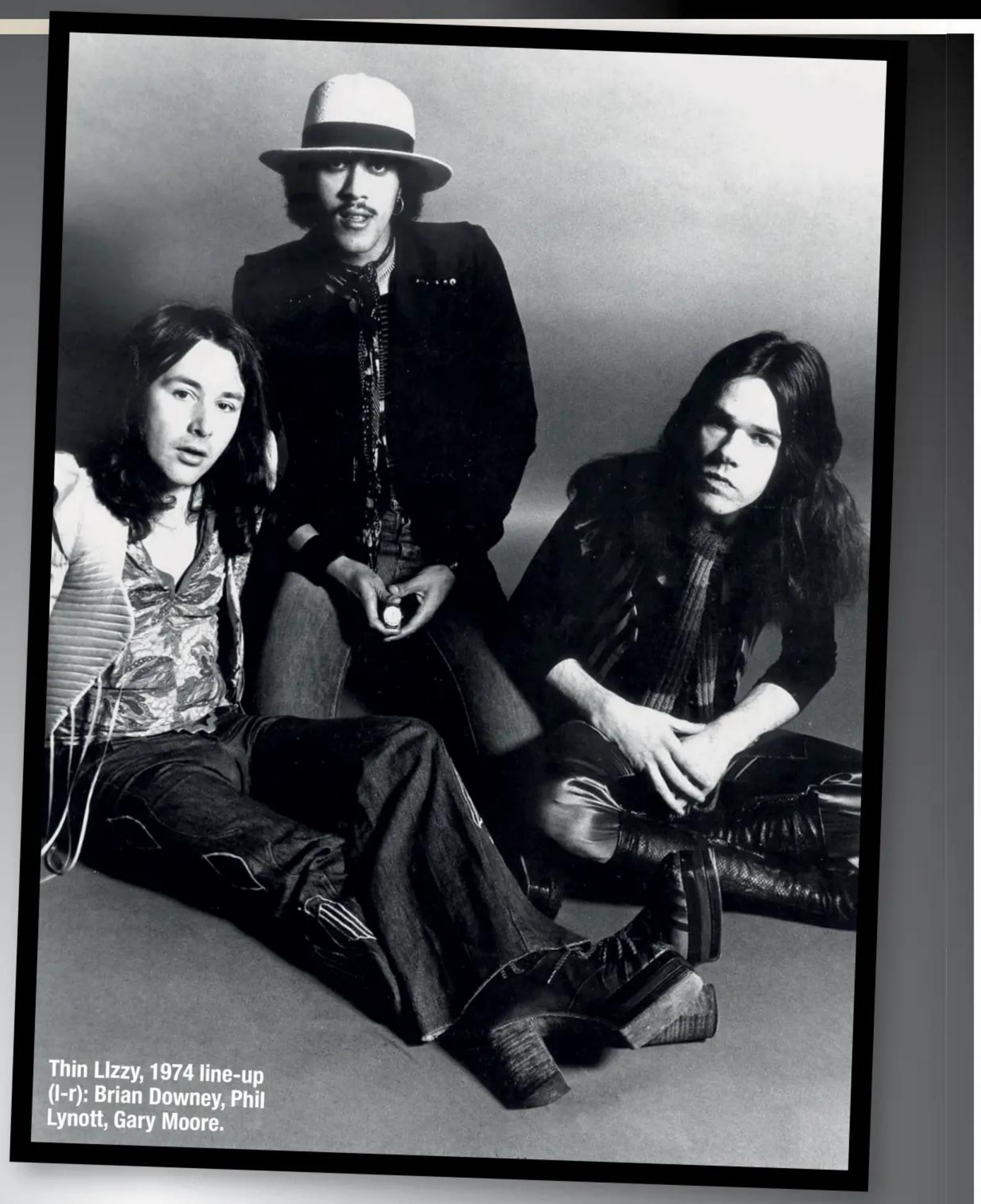
Ian Taylor remembers trying to get the track done with Albert overdubbing on the basic rhythm track. "He takes his guitar out, and tunes it up roughly. Graham Lilley says, 'Do you want to plug into a strobe tuner?'. Albert says, 'No I'm fine'. And then we try to play with the track and he's miles out of tune. And then it's, 'well you need to be in tune with the track, Albert'. 'No no, you need to be in tune with me', because he is used to playing with his own band who had to be tuned to him – not the other way round. If he isn't in concert pitch it doesn't matter. If he says it's in E and it isn't in concert E, but it's Albert's E then it doesn't matter, everybody tunes to him. We tried running the tape at a different speed. Then we spent a couple of hours going through the solo note by note and we fiddled around. Then Gary looked at me and said, 'What are we doing? It doesn't sound any better and it doesn't sound like Albert. Let's forget it and go with what we have.'"

As well as Sarm West and Metropolis, other studios were used to assemble the album. The strings were recorded at Abbey Road, while the George Harrison track *That Kind Of Woman* was done at George Harrison's studio as a demo, with Nicky Hopkins contributing some beautiful piano and Graham Walker overdubbing the drums at Metropolis. Gary and his wife Kerry were living in Henley, close to George and Olivia Harrison. Gary was accepted into that Henley rock star enclave and became very close with George for a while, appearing on the second Traveling Wilburys album and even turning down a request to be in Bob Dylan's touring band.

Although the Peter Green Les Paul did feature on the album on *Midnight Blues* and *Stop Messin' Around,* the main guitar was another 1959 Les Paul Standard purchased at the end of 1988. For such songs as *Texas Strut,* a tribute to Stevie Ray Vaughan and Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, out came the vintage 1961 salmon pink Stratocaster. The original owner was claimed to be Tommy Steele, but in 1981 it found its way to a Greg Lake recording session, brought in by a dealer looking to sell it to Lake. He thought it looked a bit battered, so Moore, who was also on the session, snapped it up.

Moore was extremely nervous about the reaction of the fans and the critics. He feared that it would alienate his rock fans while failing to impress the blues community who would sneer at his credentials. But even quite early on in the process, while the shape of the album was uncertain, Bob Daisley turned to Moore and said, "This is going to be the biggest thing you have ever done." How right he was.

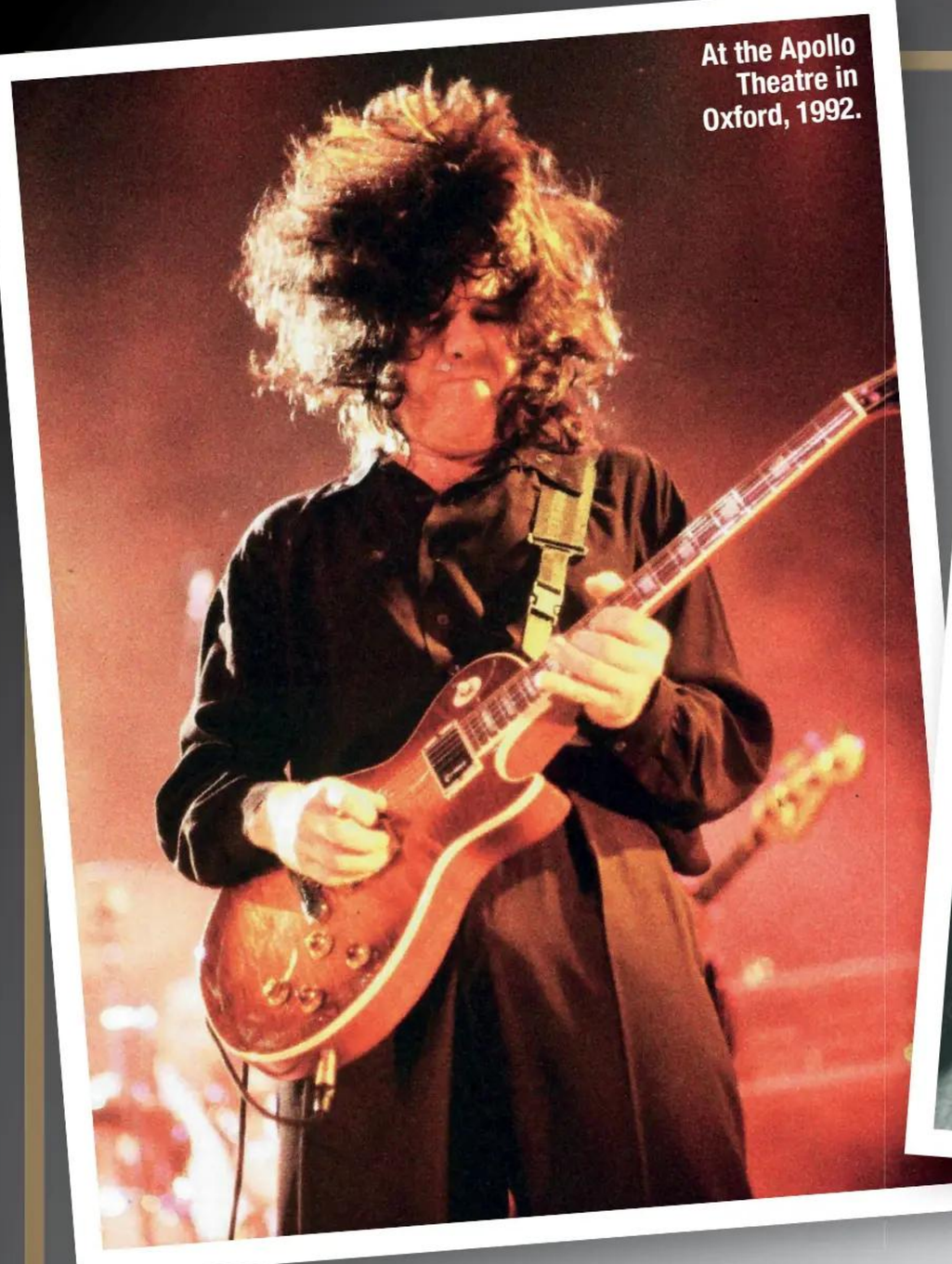
Ian Taylor first got a hint of what they might have achieved when he went to master the album at Abbey Road. "Chris, their mastering engineer, was one



Thin Lizzy, 1974 line-up (l-r): Brian Downey, Phil Lynott, Gary Moore.

"Albert King freaked everybody out by tipping a load of bullets on the table."

PHOTOSHOT



At the Apollo Theatre in Oxford, 1992.

Trading licks with Albert King in 1990.

of their older guys there. He did various bits and pieces to it, then you play it in real time to master it onto vinyl. Chris turned round to me and said, 'This is a really good album, you know.' And here is a guy who is listening to albums all day. That was the first time it occurred to me because when you go to master it, you are listening to the whole album. In the studio, you are still fixing things, fiddling with the order. About two weeks later Steve rang me and said, 'this is going to be a big record'."

It took a while to sort out exactly who was going to be in the tour band to promote the album. Eventually Moore settled on Andy Pyle and Graham Walker, with Don Airey on keyboards and also acting as MD with the horn section to form The Midnight Blues Band. The original tour was only scheduled to run a few weeks, but as the single *Still Got The Blues* and the album began to climb the charts all over the world, the tour just grew. For Airey, Moore was absolutely on fire: "His playing was unbelievable on that tour, just unbelievable. Sometimes I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Jon Lord came up to me and said something very complimentary about my Hammond playing. But he said, 'Don't take this wrong, but it's not surprising given what's going on out front.' And Andy Pyle was also very important in all this. He was very rigorous about the tempo, a very sparse player, but just exactly the right amount of notes. He didn't conduct the band as such, but he did what a bass player should do and he held it together beautifully."

Although the band knew things were going well sales-wise because dates kept being added, they had no idea how well. It wasn't just that there were more dates, the size of the venues rose dramatically, from theatre-size venues to massive outdoor festivals. "We did a gig in Holland called the Parkpop Festival in front of about 300,000 people," says Graham Walker, "and we came offstage and there were all these TV cameras and a red carpet with a fence on either side and motorbike outriders for the tour bus. We were completely shocked and didn't understand what was going on. I think the album and the single were right at the top of the charts. You kept on tripping over record company people all of a sudden." They would pull into a truck stop anywhere in Europe and hear the single on the radio or, on some occasions, the whole album.

> **"There were TV cameras, a red carpet and motorcycle outriders for the tour bus."**

Albert Collins joined the tour for about 30 dates and Albert King was flown back to do the video shoot for the single *Oh Pretty Woman* and for the filming of one of the two nights at Hammersmith Odeon in May. John Wooler was at the rehearsal: "Albert King walked in. He was extremely competitive and was known for going on stage, playing really loud and blowing the competition away. But as he got older he couldn't deal with volume, so the first thing he said to Gary was 'you've got to turn it down'."

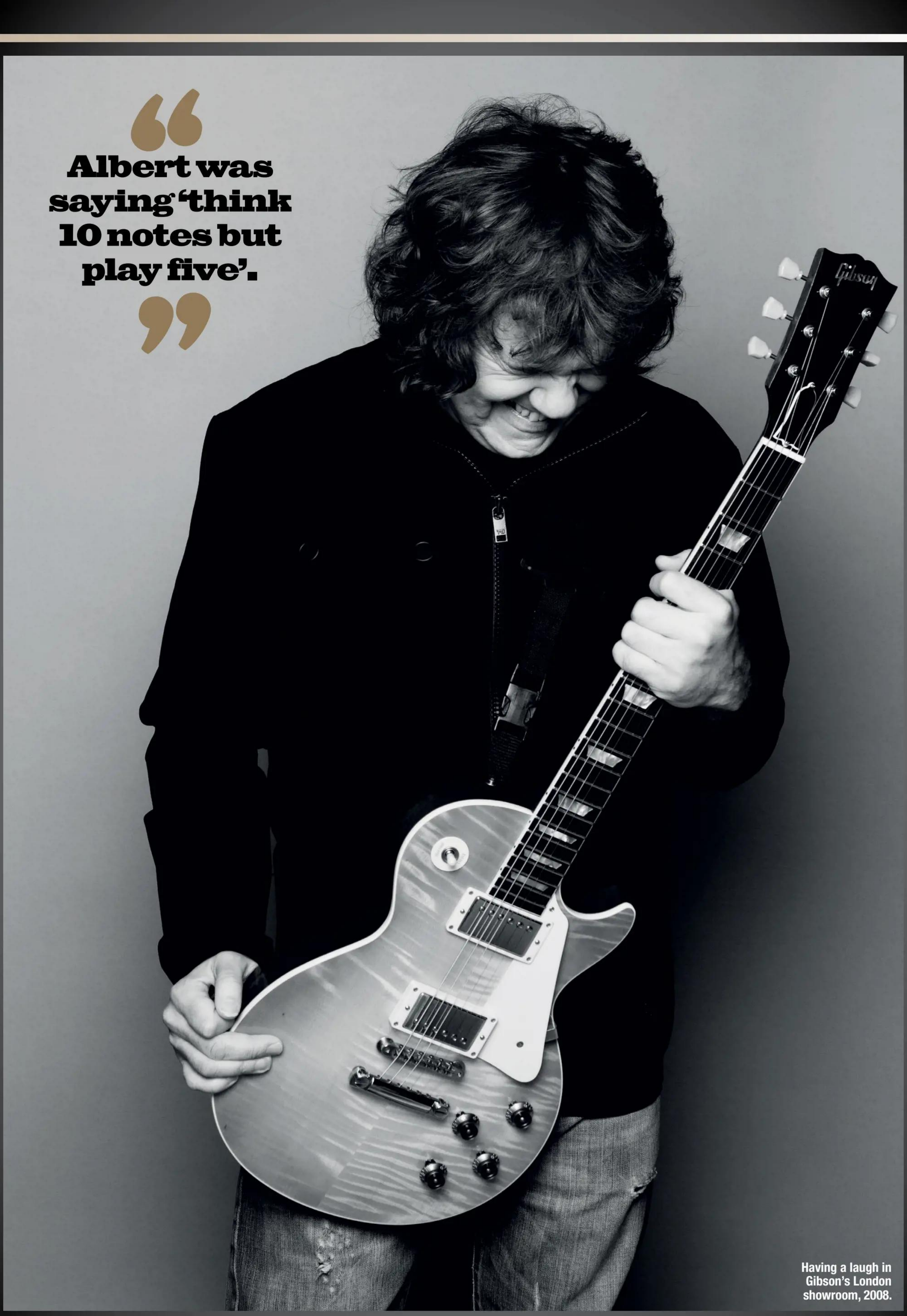
King also ticked Gary off for playing too many notes; Graham Lilley recalls King's rebuke, 'Ah told that other boy, my other son, Stevie Ray, stop playing all them notes. And Gary's like 'oo, fuckin' hell, getting told off here!' And he did take it on board; Gary himself said he had come from that rock thing – and he said that he was doing a blues album, but coming from the rock side of it and overplaying, too many notes and tearing the backside out of it – and on the later albums, he found another voice to it all and started listening to the space between the notes. Albert was saying 'think 10 notes but play five'."

Wooler remembers King trying to take over, saying he needed to teach the horn section what to do. "They were talking about doing *Stormy Monday*. Albert says to Gary, 'What key do you want to do it in?' And Gary says, 'Anything but A flat. I hate the key of A flat.' 'Okay, no problem.' When he walks onto the stage at Hammersmith Odeon, they are about to do *Stormy Monday* and Albert shouts out to Gary, 'A flat!!' and goes straight into it."

The tour rolled on to Moore's debut at the Montreux Jazz Festival (the first of five appearances) in July and then large festival dates in Europe supporting Tina Turner on her tour to promote *Foreign Affair*. But there was trouble in paradise. "I remember we were at the Deutsche Museum in Munich,' says Don Airey. "This is where Gary started having trouble with his ears and he was beside himself. He was sitting outside in the

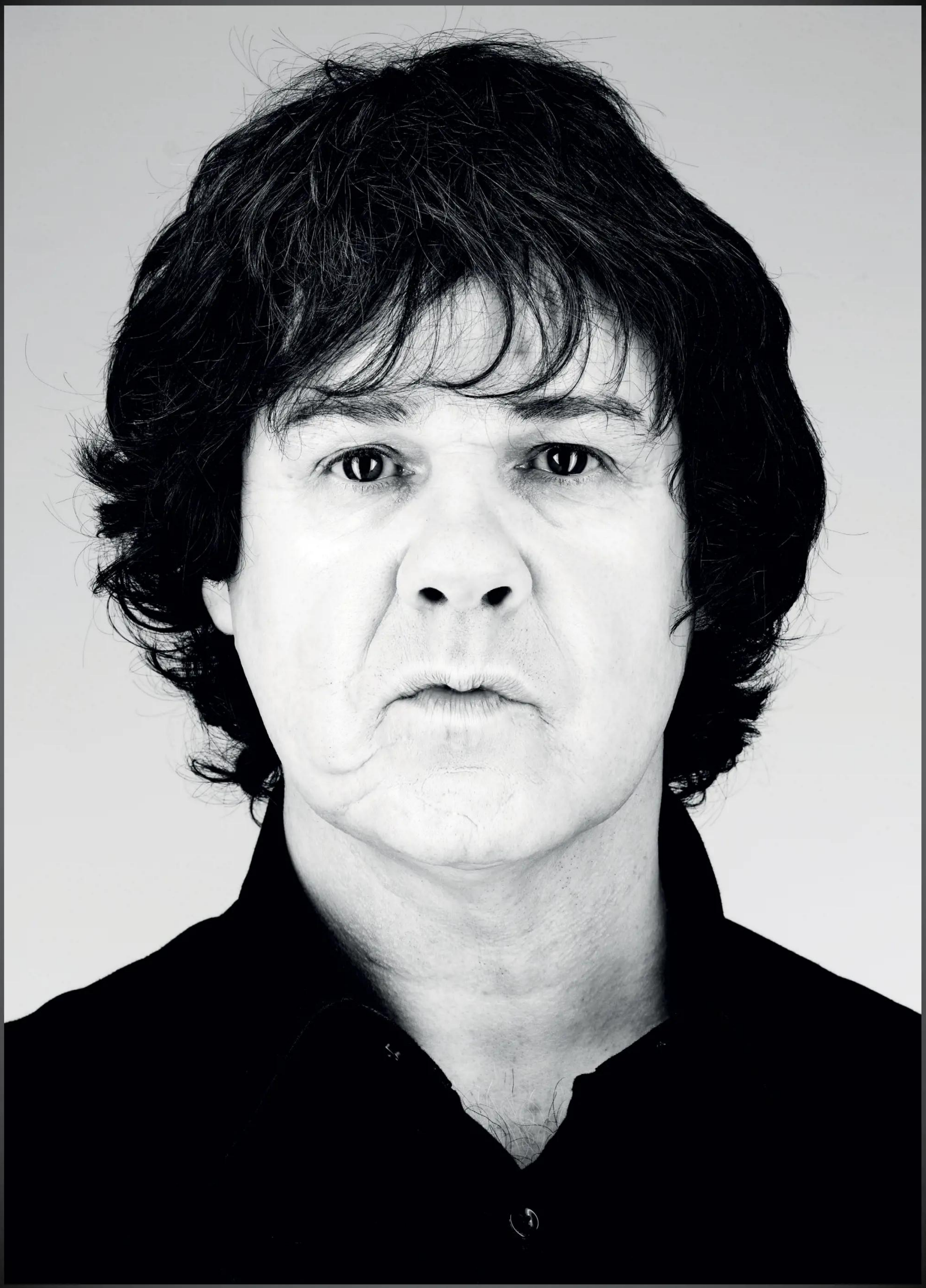
REX/XX

“Albert was saying ‘think 10 notes but play five’.”



SAM SCOTT HUNTER

Having a laugh in Gibson’s London showroom, 2008.



SAM SCOTT HUNTER

park having a coffee and I wandered past and he was so upset." Graham Lilley remembers Moore trying out ear plugs and getting an infection, which made a bad situation worse.

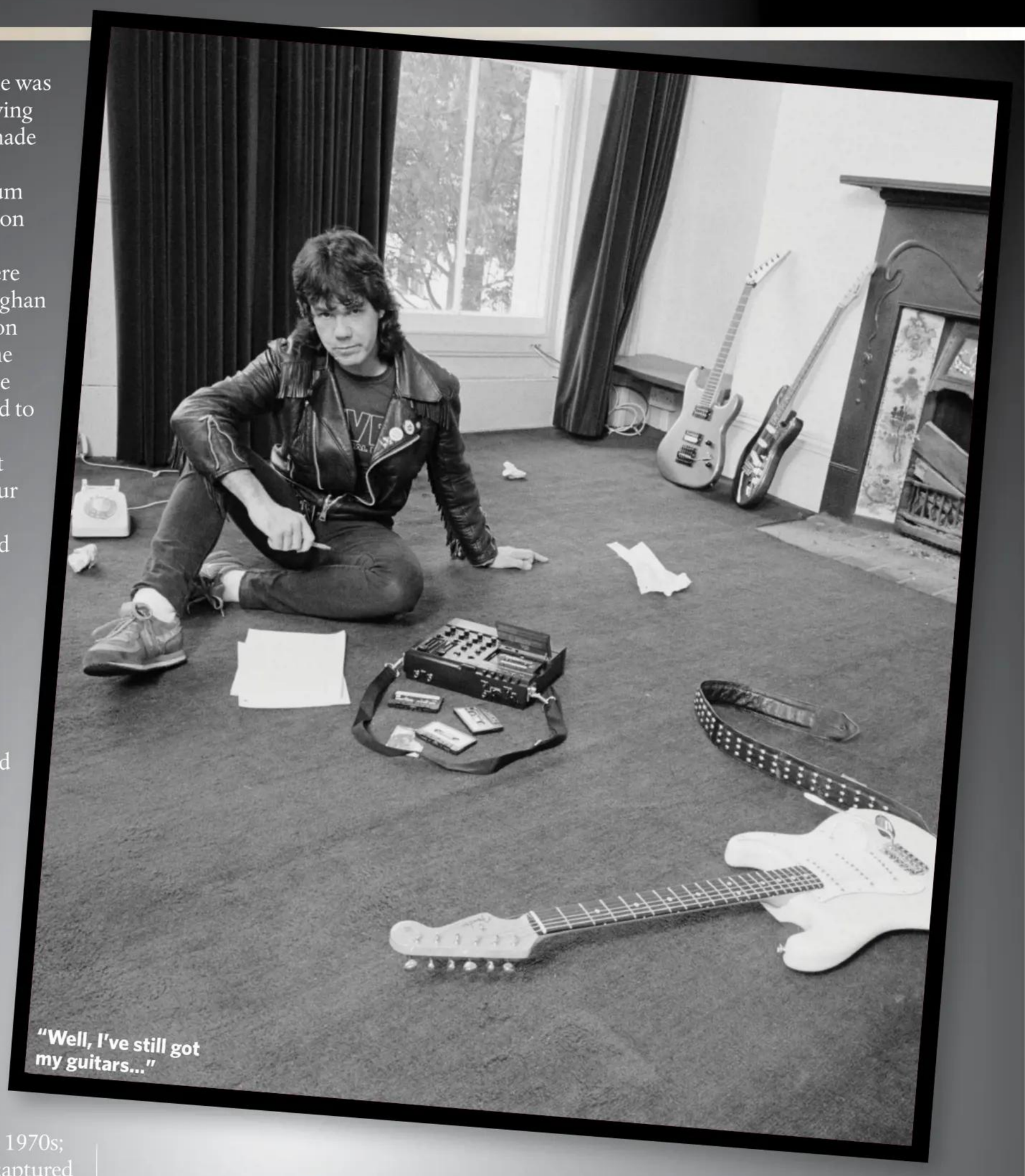
Then there was the issue of touring. The album had gone gold in the US, racking up half a million copies and was still selling, far outstripping anything Moore had previously sold there. There was a plan to tour the US in support of the Vaughan Brothers until the horrific death of Stevie Ray on August 27 that year put paid to that idea and the impetus was somehow lost. The day after Stevie Ray died, Gary played *The Sky Is Crying* dedicated to the great Texan blues guitarist. In Australia, manager Steve Barnett reckons the album went platinum or even double platinum and a big tour was in the offing. But Gary didn't want to do a long tour of anywhere; he hated both flying and being away from home for extended periods.

Barnett was frustrated by Moore's refusal to extend the tour further afield. "In the world we live in, when you have that opportunity, you have to really strike. But, on the other hand, it took Gary to a much wider audience, both in terms of record sales and touring. *Still Got The Blues* dramatically changed his life. I went in and renegotiated the deal with Virgin. It all worked out brilliantly for him."

Wooler has a disc on his wall for three million worldwide sales – and that may well be an underestimate.

For Gary, the success of the album set him on a path, which apart from a couple of deviations, he followed for the rest of his career. He even recorded a complete album of Peter Green compositions, *Blues for Greeny*, released in 1995.

The album had a broader impact, too. While the international white blues scene was dominated by British guitarists in the 1960s and 1970s; the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jeff Healey captured the territory in the 1980s. *Still Got The Blues* put British blues playing back on the map, inspired a new generation of guitar players and provided much of the repertoire for the UK pub blues scene of the 1990s.



"Well, I've still got my guitars..."

GETTY

There were some sour notes down the line; for any artist, the risk of major profile is the unwelcome attention from those who feel they have contributed unrewarded to your success. Moore had to fight two separate court cases in Germany from musicians both claiming that the riff for *Still Got The Blues* had been ripped off from them. He won one and lost the other, although there was a feeling that he was on a hiding to nowhere by having to face a case brought by German musicians in a German court. Another case was brought by guitarist Ronnie Montrose, alleging that one of the Les Pauls used by Moore on the album had actually been stolen off the stage in 1972. Jurisdictional issues got that case thrown out.

And what of the famous Les Paul? Unforeseen financial problems forced Moore to sell it to a dealer. An American collector Melvyn Franks bought it, but the guitar has come home. The vintage guitar dealer Phil Harris is the guitar's custodian, instructed by Franks to give the guitar some profile. Airey says he heard Joe Bonamassa play *Midnight Blues* on it at the Royal Albert Hall this year and he "just sat there and burst into tears".

There were the sad passings too; both Alberts died just over a year apart. Albert King had not been in the best of health for some years and died in December 1993 following a heart attack The ever-friendly Albert Collins was only 61 when he died of cancer in November 1993. Of course, the ultimately tragedy in this story was the death of Moore himself, struck down by a heart attack on February 6, 2011 aged only 58 years old.

> **"The day after Stevie Ray died, Gary played *The Sky Is Crying*."**

As Gary had remembered Stevie Ray Vaughan, so Eric Clapton squared the circle of Gary's lifelong love of the seminal *Beano* album by playing *Still Got The Blues* at his Royal Albert Hall dates in the weeks following Gary's death and covering the song on his latest album, *Old Sock*.

"He (Gary) introduced himself to me a long time ago and I got an incredible feeling from the guy that he was a genuine good man and a great player. Lovely tone. And when he died I thought this was so sad. And well, it wasn't ignored, but it wasn't given a great deal of significance, so I just wanted to say thank you by doing this and I wanted his family to know as much as anybody in the public, that I cared. And I thought a good way to do it would be to show that the song itself is strong, enough to be adaptable – so I did it in a jazzy, clubby kind of way. Thank God musicians do that for one another."

But last word to Albert King, never one to readily dish out praise; " I didn't think he could play. I thought he was just another kid trying to get off into the blues guitar world…but listening to that kid play the wildest things…Golly Moses, where did he come from?"

Harry Shapiro is currently writing the official biography of Gary Moore.

Dr. John

Gris-gris or gumbo? Voodoo priest or piano-tickling New Orleans R&B guru? Dr John or Mac Rebennack?

IN THE BLUES

In mainstream, guitars run the game, but New Orleans is a piano town, with a heaped helping of horns on the side. The Mississippi Delta was the birthplace of the blues, but New Orleans was the cradle of both jazz and funk, and – in terms of its music, cuisine, language and all manner of cultural traditions – it's pretty much a law unto itself.

Its roster of great post-war piano men includes the likes of Professor Longhair, Fats Domino, Allen Toussaint, Art Neville and James Booker, but for the last four and a half decades it's Malcolm 'Mac' Rebennack, a.k.a. Dr John, who's been the personification of two great Crescent City traditions: gumbo and gris-gris. Or – to be more precise – Mac brings the gumbo (in the form of rocking R&B) and his Doc alter ego casts the gris-gris voodoo spell.

Mac Rebennack (1941–) was a musician/hustler – the top joint of his left-hand third finger was once shot off; thankfully it was surgically reattached, albeit wonkily – who became a fixture on the local studio scene, playing piano or guitar.

In 1968, producer Harold Battiste created his second great scam (the first being to somehow convince the world that the shorter, uglier half of Sonny & Cher was a genius) when he helped transform Rebennack into a reincarnation of 19th-century voodoo priest Dr John Creaux on a 'voodoo-rock' album called *Gris-Gris*.

Since then, both 'Mac' and 'Doc' have created stacks of superb albums (including not a few 'collaborations' in which the two sensibilities fused, notably *Goin' Back To New Orleans*), alternating with session stints for, among others, B.B. King, Marianne Faithfull, Ringo Starr, Johnny Winter and Stephen Dale Petit. Desitively bonnaroo or what? *CSM*

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction

DR JOHN'S GUMBO
Atco

In the absence of a complete collection, newcomers should start with a taste of *Gumbo*.

Yeah, we know it's a disgrace that, as yet, there's no full-on, career-spanning Dr John best-of album available. *Mos' Scocious* rounds up his first few years on Atlantic and *Best Of The Parlophone Years* covers his most recent period, but right now, let's stick to albums as albums. Starting with…

In 1971, Mac Rebennack came out from behind Dr John's mask to cut an album which, he said, should've been called 'More Gumbo, Less Gris-Gris'. Sidelining the voodoo schtick and retaining nothing but the Dr John byline, *Dr John's Gumbo* was the first 'roots move' album of a decade that was full of them (think John Lennon's *Rock'N'Roll*, David Bowie's *Pin-Ups*, Bryan Ferry's *These Foolish Things*, and so on). Rebennack had deeper roots than any of them, and he concocted a full-blown tribute to the wonders and glories of the classic New Orleans R&B of the 1950s.

Co-produced by Jerry Wexler and backed by the cream of local sessioneers, Rebennack dished up a smokin' casserole of Professor Longhair, Earl King, Huey 'Piano' Smith and many more, showcasing his rollicking piano and wheedling whine/croak of a voice to maximum effect. Throughout the album, beats be funky, horns be honkin' and an anthemically stellar songbook – including the likes of *Tipitina*, *Iko Iko*, *Big Chief* (with a lovely, bubbling organ part played by Ronnie Barron), *Junko Partner* and *Don't You Just Know It* (part of a Huey 'Piano' Smith medley) – is done to the proverbial turn.

The big fun everyone sounds like they're having is massively contagious, and good-time New Orleans R&B has rarely been more infectious.

GETTY

SUPERIOR
The releases that built his reputation

GRIS-GRIS
Atco

First voodoo album is still magic.

'They call me Doctor John, known as The Night Tripper…' The one which kicked it all off: hokey and kitsch it may be, but its luridly ritualistic power remains undiminished by the passing of time. With his forked tongue sticking right through his painted cheek, Doc croaks his half-comic, half-sinister incantations over some lushly exotic backdrops that are simultaneously hallucinatory and funky. Bookended by the epic title track and the monumental *I Walk On Gilded Splinters*, with a bunch of enchantingly tricky Mardi Gras dance grooves in between, this is both the 'Doc' album prototype (just as *Gumbo* is the 'Mac' album prototype), not to mention being one of the greatest stoner records of all time.

DR JOHN PLAYS MAC REBENNACK
Demon

Solid gold on the ivories.

Y'all want the best seat in the house? Guess what – it's right next to the piano. This 1981 programme of solo instrumentals (with one vocal interlude on Hoagy Carmichael's *The Nearness Of You* and a little off-mic muttering on *Silent Night*) is about as good a showcase for Mac's keyboard skillage as you can get, once again playing eloquent musical tribute to his home-town keyboard tradition. He chased it the following year with *The Brightest Smile In Town*, another one-man show, and one that's almost as cool as this album. On *The Brightest Smile*, he added vocals, flexing the tonsils on favourite standards both R&B and Tin Pan Alley, alongside the odd original.

THE BEST OF THE PARLOPHONE YEARS
Parlophone

An always-funky compilation.

The last studio decade or so was good to both Doc and Mac, and this compilation almost accomplishes what it says on the tin, even touching on *Duke Elegant* and *Mercenary*, Mac's tributes to (respectively) Duke Elegant and Johnny Mercer, alongside revisitations of both *Gumbo* and *Gris-Gris* territory ,with guest stars ranging from Paul Weller, Randy Newman and Supergrass to Mavis Staples, Cyril Neville and B.B. King. Above all, it demonstrates the extent to which Doc/Mac remained on top of his game well into his seventh decade and beyond, and the ease with which he melds with radically different backdrops while always remaining himself.

GOOD
Worth a butcher's

SIPPIANA HERICANE
Parlophone

Mini album shows huge talent.

The odd one out: this 24-minute mini-album/EP/whatever was Doc/Mac's rapid response to the horrific devastation wreaked by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Its centerpiece is the four-movement *Wade: Hurricane Suite*, and it's an awesome Crescent City concerto, fusing classical structure with elemental New Orleans-isms, followed by Mac's own *Sweet Home New Orleans*, and all framed by Bobby Charles's composition *Clean Water.* Loosely based on the traditional *Wade In The Water*, the musical tidal wave which is *Hurricane Suite* is both unlike anything else in the Mac/Doc catalogue and it's utterly characteristic of both creator and setting.

CREOLE MOON
Parlophone

The pick of the Parlophone years.

Picking the flat-out best of Doc/Mac's Parlophone albums is no easy task. It came down to a three-way standoff between a uniformly impressive trio: *N'awlinz: Dis Dat Or D'Udda* (the one packed with guest stars like B.B., Mavis, Randy, Uncle Willie Nelson 'n' all), the *Gris-Gris*-revisited epic *Anutha Zone* and this here. Self-produced, self-written (much of it in collaboration with the late Doc Pomus) and performed mainly with Doc/Mac's own home-town band Lower 9-11 (plus cameos from slide guitarist Sonny Landreth and saxmeister David 'Fathead' Newman), this panoramic portrait of New Orleans is as personal a piece of work as he/they have ever done, and as powerful. And it's fonkeh.

AVOID
Like the plague

HOLLYWOOD BE THY NAME
One Way Records

A live album you can happily live without.

Let's see… a glittering roomful of guest stars, an even more glittering mountain of Class A substances, the highest recording budget of his career and a timeframe coinciding with John Lennon's notorious Lost Weekend in LA… what could possibly go wrong? Even if you're an absolute Doc/Mac completist (and if you add in the session work, that would constitute an entire record collection all by itself), this is the one to buy last.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

GRIS-GRIS GUMBO YA YA
GRIS-GRIS

WALK ON GILDED SPLINTERS
GRIS-GRIS

RIGHT PLACE WRONG TIME
IN THE RIGHT PLACE

IKO IKO
DR JOHN'S GUMBO

HUEY SMITH MEDLEY
DR JOHN'S GUMBO

MEMORIES OF PROFESSOR LONGHAIR
DR JOHN PLAYS MAC REBENNACK

I DON'T WANT TO KNOW
ANUTHA ZONE

WADE: HURRICANE SUITE
SIPPIANA HERICANE

FOOD FOR THOT
CREOLE MOON

THE NEARNESS OF YOU
DEMON

SILENT NIGHT
DEMON

JUNKO PARTNER
DR JOHN'S GUMBO

CROKER COURTBULLION
GRIS-GRIS

DANSE KALINDA BA DOOM
GRIS-GRIS

KINGDOM OF IZZNESS
LOCKED DOWN

BIG SHOT
LOCKED DOWN

DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE
DUKE ELEGANT

THE BLUES COLLECTION

WALKIN' THE TIGHTROPE

Stevie Ray Vaughan had come back from the brink on more than one occasion in his short but troubled life. But after a health scare than damn nearly killed him, it looked like he was finally getting back on track...

Words: **Max Bell** Portrait: **Eddie Malluk**

Definitions. In step. Moving in rhythm. In conformity with one's environment. In step with the times. In step: a reference to embarking on the Twelve Steps programme whose tenets include 'We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable' and 'We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.' *In Step*. Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble's last non-posthumous album, released in June 1989.

Six months after the album came out Vaughan addressed the Aquarius Chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous at the Ritz Hotel in New York and gave them his greatest unscripted message. "I started off my drinking and using career, oh I guess… early 60s, when I was somewhere around seven or eight years old. I grew up in an alcoholic family. My father was an alcoholic, and even though I saw the problems that alcohol caused in our family, I still found it attractive for some reason. I don't know what that was; I was always a kid who was afraid I was gonna miss something. Somewhere along the line, I started trying to find out why my father would go back and continue to drink, even though every time he did I saw what happened, which was, big fights – you know, violence. We were always real scared of him. But he continued to do it anyway. I never... I never did understand what that was, until one day a few years later I realised that I wasn't doing anything any differently other than making a little bit more money, and I'd added a few drugs to it, you know.

"I guess about seven or eight years old, I started stealing drinks either… well, my parents used to have these, these '42' parties, and quite a few people would come over and they'd be havin' their Tom Collins or whatever, you know. And when somebody wasn't looking, I'd take one of the drinks and run to the kitchen, you know, an' make them a new one. And, refresh their drink, you know. It's just that I would refresh my memory about what it tasted like a lot of the time. I never really thought that it tasted very good or anything."

Maybe now we see why Stevie Ray wasn't on the dime when he came so close to death after playing the Pfalzbau in Ludwigshafen, September 28, on the German leg of his 1986 European tour. Not just him. Bass player Tommy Shannon was lying on a hotel bed sick with his own excessive cocaine and alcohol usage. He recalls how in the adjoining room Stevie was mumbling incoherently and vomiting blood and bile. Staggering to the phone Shannon pleads that an ambulance be called, and Vaughan is rushed to hospital with IVs in both arms. Miraculously he makes some sort of brief recovery, but by the time SRV and Double Trouble arrive in London to play the Hammersmith Palais on October 2, the group and most of the crew are wandering backstage like dead men. Dr Vernon Bloom, who specialises in helping addicts withdraw – he's had plenty of practice on Pete Townshend and Eric Clapton – has been contacted via Eric's people and administered the relevant meds before Vaughan and company take the stage. The show passes without incident – it is neither great nor tragic – but in the gloom, just before he's called back to encore, Vaughan slips off a gangplank and starts internal haemorrhaging. For the second time in days he is rushed to hospital. If this is a wake-up call, someone forgot to set the alarm.

The day after the Palais gig is Stevie's birthday. To paraphrase Bo Diddley's *Who Do You Love* – he's got a tombstone hand and a graveyard mind. Just 32 and he don't mind dyin'. Stevie's habit is ridiculous. He's snorting a quarter ounce of pure, pharmaceutical Merck flake cocaine a day, and necking a quart of Royal Crown scotch – at least. It doesn't touch the walls. Dr Bloom discovers his patient's already ruined septum is so corrupted that he's taken to

dissolving the cocaine in the whisky. X-rays reveal Vaughan's stomach lining is rotting. Cocaine is crystallising in the man's intestines. Bloom gives Stevie two weeks to live. Or you can stop right now and delay your death warrant. If you're very lucky. But hey, it is his birthday. Bloom allows him a small plastic cup of champagne to celebrate and to wash down the Phenobarbital.

Stevie calls his mama Martha in Dallas and breaks down: "Ma, I'm real sick. I need help. I got to come home." This isn't great news. Martha's husband Jimmie Lee Vaughan – Big Jim – is barely a month in his grave having succumbed to Parkinson's disease, his own alcoholism and a working life spent around asbestos. In any case the tour is cancelled – though the press release only states Vaughan is unwell – and the guitarist flies home to enter the Charter Lane rehab centre in Atlanta, Georgia, while Shannon goes into their Austin facility. Drummer Chris 'Whipper' Layton is in marginally better shape, though no stranger to the drug and booze frenzy that has insiders comparing Double Trouble to the Allman Brothers Band at their absolute worst. Indeed, Vaughan's performances are so erratic in the period

"He was so worn down he needed to rest, but it's hard to stop working when you're in big debt."

covering the *Soul to Soul* and *Live Alive* albums that a second guitarist, Derek O'Brien, is hired to supply some lead work on tour as Stevie's fingers can't talk the talk, while keyboards player Reese Wynans – ironically an Allman Brothers accomplice from Florida – joins the madhouse, ostensibly to add his 6 feet 6 inches of muscle to the group before they implode. Long tall Wynans is shocked by their business affairs and the amount of money they waste to line dealer pockets.

Double trouble. Everyone seems more anxious to hang around expensive studios playing ping pong and waiting for the main man to arrive bearing goodies than actually playing the blues. "The drugging was so bad I was scared for the man's health" Reese recalls. "Stevie was so worn down he obviously needed to rest, but it's hard to stop working when you're in big debt."

Flash back to autumn 1986. Stevie Ray calls his wife Lenora (aka Lenny) and soul mate for the past 13 years, but she refuses to visit him in rehab. Turns out she's been running round town with other men and spending her husband's money on hard dope. Divorce papers go to and fro. Stevie comes home to find she locked the house, cut off the electricity and taken to hanging with ne'er do wells described by local insiders as "police characters, criminals and the scum of the earth". And she took the dawg.

If there is solace in Stevie Ray's collapsing world it arrives when he bumps into a beautiful brunette, a 17-year-old Russian émigré called Janna Lapidus. She finds him sitting head bowed on the steps of Wellington Town Hall in New Zealand where Double Trouble are performing in the spring before his final collapse. A rising star in the modelling industry, Janna goes on tour in Australia with the band, and she does visit Stevie in rehab, and they will become an item. Although she's young, Janna has a wise head. During his London rehab the pair walk arm in arm in Hyde Park and pledge their allegiance to romance and loyalty, having seen an aging couple holding hands by the Serpentine. Janna's name is on *In Step* alongside the band's saviour John Hammond. Janna is credited with turning Stevie's life around.

But Vaughan turns out to have a strong constitution. On November 22 1986 the aborted *Live Alive* tour recommences and for the first time ever he plays clean and sober at Towson Centre in Maryland, with Bonnie Raitt.

It's December 1988 when producer Jim Gaines gets the call asking does he want to produce the next SRV album? Based in San Francisco, Gaines's main client is Carlos Santana, and ole Devadip knows Stevie well – they've played together. Plus, Gaines is a guitar guy. Vaughan asks him: "How do you feel about recording me when I've got 10 amps goin' at once? Think you could

Above: Stevie Ray Vaughan in full Texan garb, giving it some poncho.

Right: the cover of the *In Step* album, both a creative and personal rebirth.

THIS PAGE: PHOTOSHOT; OPPOSITE: GETTY

handle that?" Gaines has trudged through the sludge with Carlos and Ronnie Montrose, who both use six or seven amps in the studio, so he agrees. "Why not? It sounds like a nightmare. Let's do it."

Just before Christmas, Double Trouble's Epic Records man calls Jim and says: "The band wants you to make the new album. Congratulations. You got the job. By the way, I didn't want you to do it." Gaines is taken aback but hell, it's a Texas four-piece blues band, how hard can this really be? "Hard. I was the first person they ever used who wasn't from the Texas connection," he says. "It could get tense because I was also the first person to ever tell Stevie: 'Nope, that's not good enough. Do it again.'"

On *Texas Flood*, *Couldn't Stand the Weather* and *Soul To Soul* the band had produced themselves, but while Grammy Awards and critical acclaim ensue, there are many who take the line that Vaughan can't decide whether to be his heroes Albert King and Jimi Hendrix, or locate his own voice. Modern blues acts are beset by this conundrum – who needs the pastiche when we already got Muddy Waters? But there is a difference: SRV is undoubtedly a genius musician, and when the layers of parody fall away he recalls all the well-known cats, but with a fair measure of the forgotten Lonnie Mack – check him out playing bass on The Doors' *Roadhouse Blues* – thrown in for whammy punch.

Gaines and the band decamp to the Power Station in New York City to rehearse, but the producer can't record a note because there is a god-awful hum in the little room they use that sounds like you're standing underneath a pylon. Vaughan's none too happy when Gaines pulls the plug because he's used this studio before to cut *Couldn't Stand The Weather*; it's also where David Bowie made *Let's Dance*, which is smeared all over with Stevie licks and is indeed the album from 1983 that made his name.

"I moved us to Kiva Studios in Memphis and that solved the problem," says Gaines. "They had a big isolation room and it was great, since the band loved the city and the bosses loved him because he's a big star. Still had the problem with the amplification though, and I'm known as the man who made him play in a chicken coop. We were getting hum because he's using a single coil Strat, so I wrapped the room in copper wire to form a conduit and put him inside what looks like a baseball-batting cage. That pulled the interference down 70%. I could live with that."

Gaines also persuaded the boys they had to embrace the emerging digital technology that enabled him to get round the problem of using eight tracks for one guitar feed. "I was in a panic because pretty soon I'm running out of tracks. We sorted out a 32-track at the Power Station and teamed that with an analogue machine and while everyone then is fearful of digital – Stevie hated it – the tube amps were warm and we didn't have to use any slaving."

For the first time SRV and Double Trouble will record without the use of any drink or drugs. Stevie has played with his mentor Bonnie Raitt and discovered that being sober is a blessing for once, and he will go on to deliver some of his finest music since the fucked-up era when he was so majestic on Jennifer Warnes' classic Leonard Cohen tribute album *Famous Blue Raincoat* (1987), of which he remembers nothing.

"Considering he almost died in London Stevie was in great shape," says Jim. "One reason why he chose me was because I'm Mr Squeaky Clean, Mr Hillbilly," Gaines laughs. "I've never done a drug in my life. They were all going through the step programme and attending meetings every night and day. They couldn't have a drink and smokes man around. Stevie told me: 'This is the first thing I've cut with no chemical enhancement. I'm as nervous as hell.'"

If the days of climbing the walls as withdrawal kicked in were gone, that didn't mean the sessions were easy. Gaines still had to prove himself to gain entrée in to this tight-knit clan. "I trod with care. I've never been a 'world's gonna-end'

Chantel McGregor

The young British blues guitarist explains SRV's influence on her playing.

"I've covered his song *Lenny*, which is about his wife, and I studied the album *Couldn't Stand The Weather* as part of my degree. He improvises so well, mixing blues jazz and rock. As a player he's the one to emulate. Everyone tries to be him but nobody can. It's all in his hands.

"John Maher also covers *Lenny*, and Stevie hugely influences Kenny Ray Shepherd and Jonny Lang. The best players take what they can and then add their own stamp. It's rubbish to say that SRV was copying Albert King and Hendrix. He took plenty from them, but he moved it on. Stevie's stuff is actually bluesier than Jimi. He's not as out there in a psychedelic sense. Stevie Ray is a bit more reserved and tasteful. There's so much emotion to his playing on *Life Without You*.

"It may be 24 years since he died, but you only have to look at how many youngsters play his stuff. Go into a guitar shop and the kids are still playing *Pride And Joy*, and because of John Maher's appeal to a younger crowd he brings them back to Stevie. I concentrate on the tones and pickup combinations he uses. He makes a guitar sing without too many effects. I'd love to have a go at *Riviera Paradise*, which I first heard as a 12-year old at a jam session. It's cool when he starts to move into jazz. He's a master of mixing genres and coming out with something amazing."

type and we became friends as the recording progressed. Stevie gave me his trust and laid a lot of his life on me in private moments. I was shocked and privileged to hear that. Stevie told me he wanted to make amends and move forward and *In Step* and the album he made with brother Jimmie (*Family Style*) right before he died were his way of removing any bitterness and jealousy from his life and letting it rest.

"When the album was finished he gave me a hug and he wouldn't let go for minutes. Man, I realised he needed a hug real bad. I learnt a bit about his father, those difficult situations, and I heard how his mother had received that, too. I know how much those boys loved their mom. I treated Stevie and the boys like cousins. I loved 'em, but I couldn't let them get too much into my life because making an album is business."

Bro' Jimmie Vaughan from the Fabulous Thunderbirds hung out during some sessions on *In Step*, especially when work moved to Los Angeles, and Gaines noticed that maybe the older man was slightly jealous – and certainly in awe of his kid brother, who had achieved such notoriety by playing with Bowie and Nile Rodgers, and especially on Albert King shows, trading white boy licks with AK's driven Flying V. Stevie was as shy as Jimmie was ebullient. Says Gaines: "He was a small guy but he had very strong hands, and that's how he could handle those big brass strings he used, especially on the 1959 Fender Strat" (actually a 62/63 mongrel SRV called his "first wife" or "Number One").

The material that became the *In Step* album impressed the savvy Gaines. It is often described as SRV's confessional album, but that isn't the whole truth. Obviously *Crossfire*, *Tightrope* and *Wall of Denial*, with lyrics that refer to being '*Afraid of my own shadow in the face of grace*' and '*demons from the garden of white lies*,' deal with addiction and redemption, but Stevie didn't write those words – they were penned by his long-time friend and accomplice, drummer songwriter Doyle Bramhall, who had trodden a similar path and channelled Vaughan's misery better than he could have done himself. The deeply personal stuff was dispatched first in early January, to get it out the way.

Wrapped around those epic tunes are startling takes on songs by Chester Burnett (*Love Me Darlin'*), Buddy Guy (*Leave My Girl Alone*) and Willie Dixon (*Let Me Love You Baby*) – these situate Vaughan in his natural milieu, less a Hendrix clone and more an old – well 34-year-old – blues man.

In fact Stevie Ray still didn't feel willing to bare his own lyrical soul, but he made up for that with the gorgeous *Travis Walk* and the stupendous *Riviera Paradise*, Gaines' favourite moment. "I only heard that as a jam in New York, but they had it worked out in Memphis. To set the scene: It was 1am. I turned all the lights way low. Stevie is head down. Tommy and Chris are in the dark. I knew I only had a few minutes of tape on the reel and they start playing, and Holy Shit! It's magic. As the tape spins it's so good I have shivers up my spine, but I'm worried we'll run out. I have to get his attention but he's got his back to me, so I motion to Chris Layton: 'CUT CUT' and then Stevie looks at Chris and they nod. And as the last seconds of tape spool out they end the song and that's the only take we ever did."

Gaines finished the album over three

Below: SRV with one of his biggest guitar heroes, the great Buddy Guy.

KEVIN NIXON, GETTY x2

months and regards *In Step* as a success with a proviso. "Stevie hated doing vocals, like really hated that process. I'd have to line him up with Halls cough drops, honey, tea and lemon – anything to get him in the booth. His attitude was: 'I'm a guitar player who has to sing.' The other problem I had was when he couldn't get hold of Janna on the phone. She was in NYC modelling or at the agency or in the apartment she shared with the other girls. They were so young they had a housemother. Stevie would get incredibly nervous if she didn't pick up. He was so madly in love with her that the sessions would come to a screeching halt and the other guys got pissed off at me! They'd say: 'Go get him, make him come back', and I'd say: 'Dude, he's in your band, you go and get him.'"

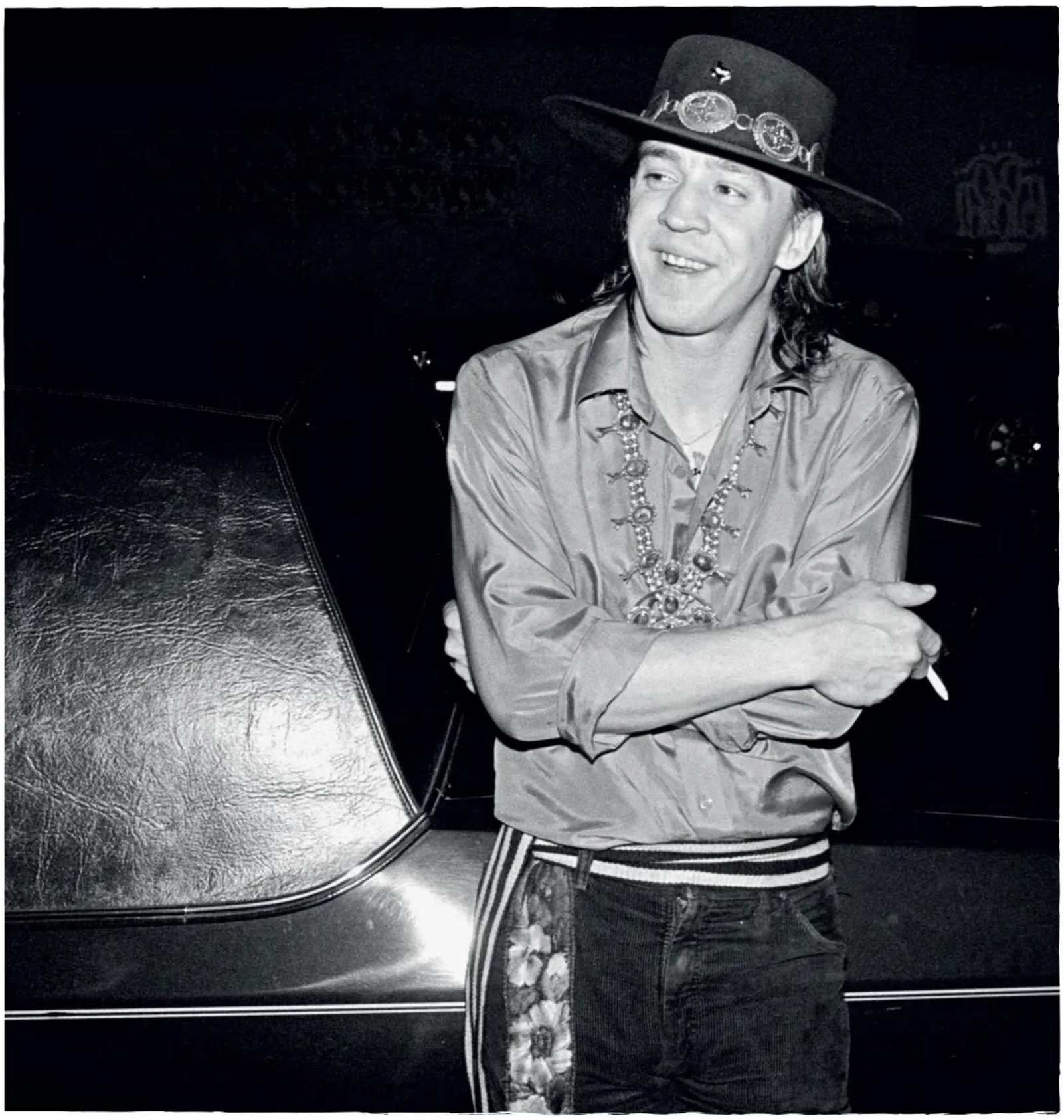
Vaughan also had a tendency to get bored. At those times he'd go into the studio on his own and play Hendrix songs for hours to himself or change the mood with some Buddy Guy or Lonnie Mack tune from his vast repertoire. Gaines would tape some of those moments, surreptitiously, but when he sent the tapes to Epic they got lost, and that infuriates him because: "At those times, you would swear that Hendrix was in the room."

Sometimes Albert King dropped by or even sat in, which was a problem because he couldn't be used for contractual reasons and he was apt to throw in some none too helpful comments that had to be politely heard and ignored. But he was also a sweet, somewhat distracted guy. One day a call came through from Jon Bon Jovi asking Stevie – and Albert – if they'd like to guest at the hairy rock god's LA show. King homes in on this request and asks SRV over the playback: "Hey Stevie. These Jim Bon Jovis: are they pretty big?" Learning, yes they are, King's eyes lit up, but in the event he didn't go and chose to go and play cards with a lady friend.

Tenor sax man Joe Sublett and trumpeter Darrell Leonard made their debut as the Texicali Horns on *In Step*. Gaines wanted them to emulate the Oakland East Bay funk and swagger of his beloved Tower of Power horns, but they stuck to their Texan/Oklahoma blues and shuffles instead. Joe and Darrell were tight together, but Joe had known SRV since 1973 when he was playing alongside the great Marc Benno in The Nightcrawlers, then Paul Ray and the Cobras, and thus to Triple Threat and Double Trouble. They'd been roommates off and on, swapping riffs on Bobby Bland and Ray Charles tunes, or shooting the breeze while listening to King Curtis and David 'Fathead' Newman albums, or marvelling at the silky musicianship of Lee Allen and Wes Montgomery.

Sublett was aware that his old colleague had been through major changes in the interim, because SRV's heavy partying went way back to the mid-70s when he and Bramhall raised it high on the hog in Dallas and Austin.

"I saw *In Step* as a new birth, although he – all of them – were definitely into the AA book and there was a lot of Christian and higher power talk going on, which comes with that territory," says Joe now. "I figured Stevie had always had some Christian elements, even in the bad craziness and party all night days he had a spiritual interest. I wasn't too concerned at the mood in the camp, because even when he hadn't played at his best he was still great, and now suddenly he was even better. We had a lot of discussions in his car between breaks and he off-loaded. Stevie Ray was very enlightened about playing sober, and very scared."



Above: Stevie alone, with a smile and a cigarette.

> **"Even when he hadn't played at his best he was still great, and now he was even better."**

Sublett didn't see him when he'd gone through the terrible stages of his withdrawal – he saw a man who was moving into a kind of Band of Gypsys phase. "Funk meets blues. Maybe with a bit of Kenny Burrell jazz thrown in. Stevie was an ear player; he didn't read charts. But he could learn a riff in a second and instinctively knew the changes and the octaves – all the little flavours."

Joe was knocked out by what he saw and heard. He'd played on *Soul To Soul* in 1985, and seen the other side of Stevie; now it was like regular folks. The horn parts were cut in Los Angeles, but with mutual schedules starting to mount up there was little time to reminisce. Double Trouble were itching to get back on the road long before *In Step*'s June '89 release, and the Texicali boys were finishing off an album with Bruce Willis, *If It Don't Kill You, It Just Makes You Stronger*, so in the event they cut *Crossfire*, which became a huge radio hit, and *Love Me Darlin'* before they hooked up for some West Coast dates with the Trouble, augmenting their section with David Woodford's baritone.

"It was fun playing the album tracks live because that record was different sonically; more centred. Before there was this thing of having a guitarist who is incredibly loud but are you hearing the rhythm section? Now you could hear Tommy's bass and it

was better balanced. It was about more than Stevie's virtuosity, and yet his singing is more confident. That was down to Gaines who was an incredible diplomat, who could tell him: 'Hey look, let's hear you sing and back off a bit on the guitar.' He was worthy of respect, whereas another guy might have been met with: 'Who the hell are you to tell me with my track record, how I should sound?' Gaines knew the times were changing and it wasn't enough just to sound like a blues player on the radio – you had to have something else. And Stevie? I guess he figured, hell I might just learn something to my advantage."

In the old days Stevie and Joe were like young punks, everything was about the music and the guitar and Stevie would say: "Every time I play a solo, it's like I'm breakin' outta jail." On a personal note Sublett recalls SRV's "huge hands, like Howlin' Wolf's big ol' paws", and his pleasant nature. "For years he lived in the house he bought for his mom in Dallas. He never owned any big cars and could care less about possessions. The best thing for him was Janna, because he'd had a lot of turbulence in his marriage. I remember his smile, and if there was a hang up in a session he'd have a goofy grin and say:

REX, PHOTOSHOT

Above: back together with his big brother Jimmie for the *Family Style* album.

Left: a shy man in real life, SRV came alive with a guitar around his neck.

"His only ego trip was that when he played, he would never want to give you less than 100%."

'This too shall pass'. He was a hilarious guy really, with a rubber face. He liked pulling stupid expressions. He told me he busted his nose seven or eight times falling out of trees or off cars, but he wasn't just a simple soul. He was very intelligent. I never saw him as the guy in the hat or the badass guitar slinger or the Spaghetti Western character. He was never a hard-arsed mean guy. His only ego trip was that when he played, he would never want to give you less than 100%. He wasn't trying to be better than you; he was just trying to be his best. If people told him: 'Hey man, you're great," he'd make a joke out of it."

While SRV had an image – the hats, the Native American silver, the poncho and soft suede Cheyenne warrior boots, even that was no big deal to him. "He had that look which is what people expected of him and he knew they liked to see him dressing up. But he never took himself so seriously. When I first met him I gave him a flat brown hat, because those Stetsons he wore got so funky."

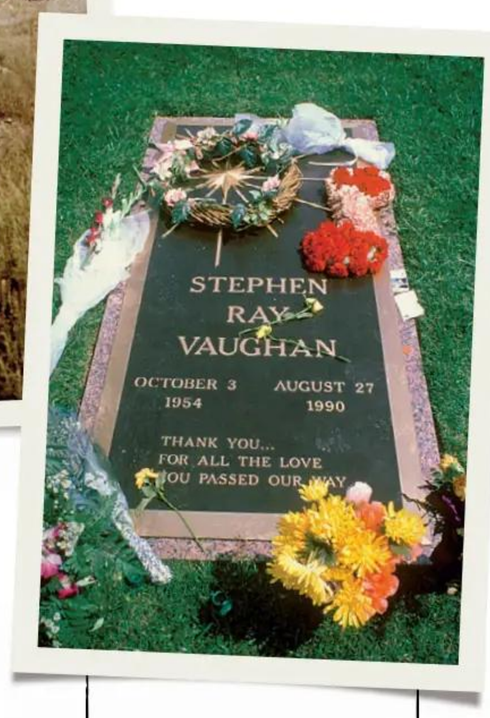
Darrell Leonard wasn't one of the inner circle, but he was impressed with the man from the outset. "As a brass player you think, 'Oh everyone plays guitar. I'll just emulate what he does.' It was harder to do that with him. He didn't show me any clichés. He didn't play the obvious. He took the language of the black blues guys and turned it into his voice."

The Texicali boys were overdubbed in LA just before the *In Step* resumed. In the period after his collapse and before he died Vaughan would play some 300 shows, including The Fire meets The Fury bash with Jeff Beck. Leonard suddenly got the SRV trip. "His connection was all about the audience and letting them know he'd changed. He talked about it directly every night. His thing was: 'You don't have be the last person to leave the party.' He made it a positive. Now there was no party. No pot. No beer. No crazy men out of control with powders and needles. I'd seen all that. Don't forget Stevie came out of the Austin scene when it was stay up all night. Get high. Repeat. That's how the blues movement started there. It wasn't the rinky-dink state capital it is today."

If Vaughan hadn't taken that fateful helicopter ride, Leonard believes they'd have worked together again. "He didn't have any big star vibe. He was regular. I spent one night with him on the bus driving from Northern California to LA for the Greek concert, and he told me about all the shitty stuff. He had hidden depths. But he was cool. I never loaned him money. He never didn't show up. He was clean and sober. I saw the best SRV possible. I've been lucky enough to play with both him and with Duane Allman and I can hear them on the air."

In early 1990 the Vaughan bothers cut their long-mooted *Family Style* album that reunited Stevie with Nile Rodgers and some of the cast from Bowie's *Let's Dance*. Rodgers hadn't wanted him to play on that, telling Bowie: "He's just an Albert King wannabe." But Bowie had been knocked out by Double Trouble when they were an unsigned act playing the Montreux jazz festival and told Rodgers: "You're wrong. He's a unique artist."

The producer changed his mind soon afterwards. "He was like a child who was a genius. He was amazed when I sampled his guitar through a Synclavier. 'What the fuck is that?' 'That's your guitar!' 'Holy crap I can play a note and



move it from here to here?' For a person of his virtuosity you never met a more humble person. He wasn't fake humble. He really was charming and sweet."

Jimmie Vaughan regarded *Family Style* as a clean slate for their relationship. "We wanted to do a record that showed everything that we could do on the guitar. The record's got all of the licks that our favourite guitar players did, plus other stuff. It's got Albert King, B.B. King, Johnny Watson, T-Bone Walker, Lonnie Mack, Hubert Sumlin and Freddie King. It's like a short history of who we listened to."

Yet in many ways it was still like the old days. "One of the first things we cut was *Brothers*, where we used the same guitar, pulling it out of each other's hands. People are always asking us questions about what it was like when we were kids, and they probably think that it was just like that, us fighting over the same guitar. So I thought, well, hell, let's give it to 'em! It was just for fun. And even though it's the same guitar and the same rig, the tones sound different. The whole project was just fun, and that sort of set the tone."

Summer of 1990, Double Trouble went on the road with Joe Cocker before their *piéce de résistance* – two nights with Eric Clapton, Jimmy, Buddy Guy and Robert Cray at Alpine Valley, Wisconsin. After the second show, which climaxed with an encore of *Sweet Home Chicago*, most of the entourage headed to board four chartered helicopters to take them back to the Windy City and a good night's rest. Clapton recalls how foggy the early morning of August 27 was.

"I didn't want to fly at all. I was wiping condensation off the windows and thinking: 'We're all gonna die.'" Then they took off and above the weather was clear sky and starlight.

Vaughan was on a flight with three of Clapton's crew. In the early hours it was reported they never landed in Chicago. In fact their pilot had taken off and crashed into a ski run on the side of a mountain after 42 seconds. When Jimmie Vaughan went to identify Stevie's body he had to so by recognising his distinctive silver jewellery."

Shannon and Layton sat in their hotel room and wept. They'd gone into Stevie's room hoping he'd be there, but the bed was still made with chocolates on the counterpane and the alarm radio was playing The Eagles' *Peaceful, Easy Feeling*.

A strange thing happened at that last gig. Those who knew Stevie said he played with a halo of light around him. His guitar tech Rene Martinez remembered him giving everyone a huge hug and telling them how much he loved them. He had an aura about him, like a premonition.

At Stevie's funeral the mourners included Stevie Wonder and Dr John, who sang *Amazing Grace* and *Ave Maria* while Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, Rodgers, Clapton and ZZ Top wept a Texas flood in the Laurel Land Memorial chapel. Stevie's marble and bronze headstone simply gave his dates, his name and the inscription that says 'Thank you… For all the love you passed our way.'

Stevie's AA speech had spoken of commitment and letting go; of his fears and his desire to help others. He was amazed and grateful to be alive since he'd never believed he'd even make it to 21. His final words to the gathering were heartfelt.

"I thank y'all for letting me be here with you. Whether I know what to say about it or not, it means a lot to me, and I thank you, okay?"

He was back on track. He was in step.

Above: together with Robert Cray, Eric Clapton and brother Jimmie, right before the crash.

Insets: the wreckage from that fateful night, and Stevie's final resting place.

ROBERT KNIGHT, GETTY

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Hail the queen of gospel: Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

Gospel according to...

…Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the Staple Singers and Sam Cooke. **Alice Clark** selects some of the most righteous albums.

THOMAS A DORSEY, the son of a Georgia preacher man who began his career penning lewd blues tunes and backing Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey on barrelhouse piano, is widely acknowledged as the founding father of modern gospel. On visiting the National Baptist Convention in 1930, he swapped rolling dice and drinking fortified wine for sanctification, and meshed his sacred lyrics with the secular rhythms of blues and jazz – much to the horror of established churches, who banned his work.

His songbook contained more than 800 hymns, including *Peace In The Valley*, which found a home in the hearts of soloists like Sallie Martin. She with her Sallie Martin Singers can be experienced on the *Precious Lord* (Charley) selection. Soon quartets were getting in on the act, such as the Swan Silvertones, The Fairfield Four, The Mighty Clouds Of Joy and The Original Five Blind Boys Of Alabama. The first named's *My Rock/Love Lifted Me* (Ace) is a must, showcasing lead singer Claude Jeter's exceptional vocal prowess. The latter's *Oh Lord Stand By Me* paired with *Marching Up To Zion* is worth checking out too. Defined by Clarence Fountain's frenzied, exuberant vocals, the title track is their finest moment, a mesmerising hymn, later reconfigured by Ben E. King as *Stand By Me*.

Also try Dorothy Love Coates And The Original Gospel Harmonettes' *The Best Of* (Ace). Such was the gusto of Coates' live performances that onlookers feared she'd die mid-performance of a heart attack. She was just as exciting on record, pioneering a shouting style from her debut, 1951's *I'm Sealed*. A fine songwriter, she authored standards like *That's Enough*, later reworked by Ray Charles and Johnny Cash.

Aretha Franklin's 1972 *Amazing Grace* captures her with her mentor James Cleveland and the Southern California Community Choir at the New Temple Missionary Baptist Church in LA, giving the performance of her life.

ESSENTIAL
The perfect introduction

SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

The Original Soul Sister *PROPER*

The sensational foundations of modern gospel.

This four-CD, 81-track box set, with detailed notes from Joop Visser, provides the perfect introduction to Sister Rosetta Tharpe, an extraordinary talent who was one of the first to mix the church with city blues on future classics *This Train* and *Up Above My Head I Hear Music In The Air*.

Born in 1915 in Cotton Plant, AR, she was mentored by her mother, the gospel shouter Katie Bell Nubbin aka Mother Bell, honing her craft from the age of four singing and playing the guitar under the moniker Little Rosetta Nubin.

By the time she reached 23, in 1938, and was recording her first records, she'd moved to Chicago, toured the country, got married, got divorced and re-settled in New York.

Those early songs teamed her with Lucky Millinder's Jazz Orchestra and changed the possibilities of gospel music; the gritty, raw *Rock Me* and the 16-bar blues of *That's All* delivered in her heart-stopping mezzo soprano voice crossed over to secular audiences. Appearances at Harlem's Cotton Club with Cab Calloway and John Hammond's Spirituals To Swing concert at Carnegie Hall also widened her fanbase. Such was her secular appeal that she was one of only two gospel acts asked to cut V discs for overseas servicemen during the Second World War.

She was also instrumental in the birth of rock'n'roll and soul – she was dubbed 'the original soul sister' – with 1944's *Strange Things Happening Every Day*. The first gospel record to make the *Billboard* Harlem Hit Parade Top 10 – later named the R&B chart – peaking at Number 2 in 1945, it was an influence on Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash (who covered it).

GETTY

SUPERIOR
The releases that built its reputation

THE STAPLE SINGERS
Uncloudy Day *CHARLY*

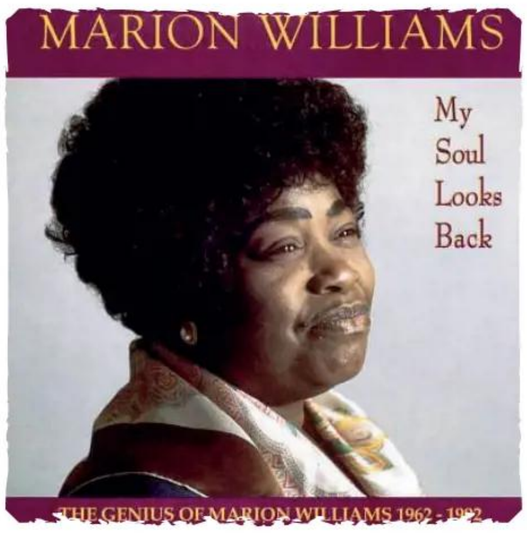
Bridging the gap between the church and soul music.

This Chicagoan family quartet centred on the dual talents of father, guitarist and tenor Roebuck Pops Staples and daughter and effusive contralto Mavis Staples. Thrilling local churches from 1948 with Mavis' sister Cleotha and brother Pervis in tow, it was their 1956 take on *Uncloudy Day* recorded for Vee Jay that secured their place on the gospel circuit, the genre's first million seller. This 20-tracker includes *This May Be The Last Time* (pillaged by the Stones) plus *Ain't That Good News* and *Come Up In Glory*.

SAM COOKE WITH THE SOUL STIRRERS
The Complete Specialty Recordings *FANTASY*

The birth of pop.

Specialty owner Art Rupe never wanted Sam Cooke to replace leader RH Harris in his label's flagship five-piece. Yet Cooke's masterful styling and rhythmic perfection on *Peace In The Valley* and *Joy, Joy To My Soul* soon won him over. The most divine moment comes courtesy of Cooke, too – his inaugural self-composition, 1951's *Jesus Gave Me Water*, a huge hit and one of *the* gospel greats. Cooke also won the Soul Stirrers a younger audience, which he took with him when he left to go secular in 1957.



MARION WILLIAMS
My Soul Looks Back: The Genius Of Marion Williams 1962-1992 *SHANACHIE*

The Wild One.

Dubbed 'Miss Personality' due to her exhilarating stage shows where she'd intersperse her vocalising with feral howls and groans, Marion Williams debuted on record as part of the Ward Singers on *How Far Am I From Canaan?* After a brief spell with The Stars Of Faith she went solo in 1965, delivering a series of faultless sermons in her sweeping falsetto. This 25-cut compilation includes uproarious readings of *How I Got Over*, *I Just Can't Help It* and *Stand By Me*.

GOOD
Worth a butcher's

MAHALIA JACKSON
Best Of 1937-1951 *ART & SOUL*

The queen of gospel.

Mahalia Jackson was the most influential female singer inspiring everyone who's anyone in soul. Her style was unorthodox – she preferred soothing spirituals and gentle paeans to the screaming and shouting of her peers. This double CD documents her 1937 Decca singles and her Apollo recordings of 1946-51. She's backed by pianist Mildred Falls on the heavenly *Move On Up A Little Higher* and *How I Got Over*. The cream of her later records are on the Columbia/Legacy 2-CD set, *Gospels, Spirituals & Hymns*.

SISTER WYNONA CARR
Dragnet For Jesus *ACE*

The banned one.

This Cleveland, Ohio singer-songwriter's progressive lyrical and musical stance caused controversy from day one. Her gospel, fused with an earthy blues feel, was sung in a deep contralto, which oozed a playful sexuality. Label boss Art Rupe thought much of it too risqué, often refusing to release her material. Those sides that did appear in 1949-54 flopped, except 1952's *The Ball Game*, but Carr, who honed her craft with the Wilson Jubilee Singers, had an outstanding talent, as this 'best of' her soulful spirituals testifies.

AVOID
Like the plague

WHITNEY HOUSTON
The Preacher's Wife *ARISTA*

Whitney does gospel on a soundtrack… regrettably.

Starring Whitney Houston, alongside Denzel Washington, the Penny Marshall directed film, *The Preacher's Wife*, is a 1996 remake of the Cary Grant vehicle, *The Bishop's Wife* from 1947. It's just about watchable but the score is plain awful, despite being the biggest-selling gospel album ever recorded and featuring bonafide church singers Cissy Houston (Whitney's mum) and Shirley Caesar.

ESSENTIAL PLAYLIST

SISTER ROSETTA THARPE
This Train/Rock Me/ Strange Things Happening Every Day/ That's All
THE ORIGINAL SOUL SISTER

MARION WILLIAMS
In The Upper Room
MY SOUL LOOKS BACK: THE GENIUS OF MARION WILLIAMS 1962-1992

SWAN SILVERTONES
Love Lifted Me
LOVE LIFTED ME

THE FAIRFIELD FOUR
Don't You Want To Join That Number
BEST OF

EDWIN HAWKINS SINGERS
Oh Happy Day
BEST OF

THE ORIGINAL FIVE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA
Oh Lord Stand By Me
OH LORD STAND BY ME

ARETHA FRANKLIN
How I Got Over
AMAZING GRACE

THE STAPLE SINGERS
Uncloudy Day/ This May Be The Last Time
UNCLOUDY DAY

SAM COOKE WITH THE SOUL STIRRERS
Jesus Gave Me Water/ Peace In The Valley
THE COMPLETE SPECIALTY RECORDS RECORDINGS

MAHALIA JACKSON
Move On Up A Little Higher
BEST OF 1937-1951

SISTER WYNONA CARR
Dragnet For Jesus
DRAGNET FOR JESUS

“WE’RE COMMITTED TO A VISION OF SHOVING IT UP THE MUSIC INDUSTRY’S ASS!”

Joe Bonamassa was discovered as a kid, mentored by the greats – and screwed by the music biz. Now it’s time for revenge...

Words: **Scott Rowley** Pictures: **Richard Pereira & Jesse Wild**

So… Who *is* Joe Bonamassa? A couple of years ago he summed himself up with the words, “I collect guitars, I work a lot and I read about politics and world events.” Is that still an accurate description?

“Yep, that pretty much sums me up,” he says. “I try to be informed. I don’t want to be the musician that’s like [thick muso voice], ‘I dunno maaaan, I just plug in and play.’ There’s nothing worse than a dumb musician and nothing worse than a musician who’s smart but acts dumb just because that’s what you’re supposed to do.”

You must have some other interests. Do you watch movies? “Not really. After an hour I get antsy.” He describes sitting at home in front of a movie with a guitar in hand, half playing, half watching. “When I’m by myself that’s not a problem, but when you’re with a girl, she’s like, ‘Come on now.’”

What about books? Do you read? “I don’t,” he says. “I have a very short attention span. Books are tough. I like bullet points.”

So you’re not gonna read this story when it’s published? “I will,” he laughs. “Word for word.”

Yeah, right. We don’t believe him. So here, for your delectation – and possibly his, if he can put his guitar down for a minute – is Joe Bonamassa. In bullet points…

IN 2012:
1 SOLO *ALBUM*
1 BCC *ALBUM*
1 BETH HART *ALBUM*
1 *ACOUSTIC LIVE* *ALBUM*
1 *LIVE DVD*
...AND A BIT OF TOURING

You think you’ve had a busy year? Joe Bonmassa’s *week* beats your year.

In 2011, Joe released more albums in 12 months than Metallica have in a decade. Here’s what 2012 looks like for Joe:

January: He has the month off, the lazy bastard.

February: Finishes next solo album, to be released in May. Goes on tour in Europe.

March: Touring Europe for the whole month. Release of *Joe Bonamassa Live At The Beacon* DVD, recorded at the New York Theatre in November.

April: On a major US tour until May 25.

Summer: Back in the studio to record Black Country Communion 3. Followed by “two weeks off” in which he’s doing an acoustic album and DVD – live and acoustic at the Vienna Opera House. “Then we may do some Beth Hart stuff. Then we may take the rest of the summer off.”

August: Back in the studio with Kevin Shirley for the *next* solo album.

September: Tour of Asia. “We’ve been to Singapore, Macaw, Hong Kong, Japan,” says his manager Roy Wiseman, “and now we’re gonna add Manila, Kuala Lumpur, Thailand.”

> **Are we gonna be millionaires? Yeah. We’re gonna be really fuckin’ rich. Tens of millions. And we don’t need to be some arena act to do that either.**
> **Roy Wiseman**

October: Australia and New Zealand.

November: "And when we come back," says Wiseman, "I just confirmed his entire tour for the Fall in the United States – the coolest theatres in America in that 2,500-3,000 seat range."

(This is what Metallica's schedule looks like:

January: Hope everyone's forgotten about *Lulu*.

February-May: As above.

June: Play Black Album at Download festival. Hope everyone's forgotten about *Lulu*.

Rest of year: Uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh…)

The hardest part of Bonamassa's life is when he stops working.

"The hardest part is coming *off the road*," he says. "The first three or four days, the silence is *suffocating*. On a big tour, you're surrounded by 18, 19 people that you see every day. There's always something moving, whether it's a truck or a kick drum or a bag. Then you go home and you sit there in your flat and – I'm a big news buff so I put on my favourite news channels – and I sit there and I go back and forth with my guitar and you hear the clock going: Tick. Tick. Tick. And it's like hitting a brick wall – boom. That's an adjustment."

Joe Bonamassa drinks 12 cans of Diet Coke a day.

Can you tell the difference between Coke and Pepsi? "Yes, blindfolded," he says without a second's hesitation. "I could tell you the difference between Diet Coke made in Britain and Diet Coke made in the US. When you drink 12 of them a day you become like a Coke-aholic."

Joe Bonamassa is a phenomenon not easily explained.

He has just played a sold-out British tour, playing to 2,500+ audiences a night in towns like Blackpool, Cardiff and Plymouth, and yet he's never had a hit, never been on the cover of a mainstream magazine, and rarely been played on the radio outside of Paul Jones's blues show on Radio 2 or Planet Rock. Despite this, his last two albums made the UK Top 20. His success, and the methods behind it, could become a template to copy in a music business struggling to cope with the collapse of old business models.

Joe is partners with his manager Roy in J&R Adventures.

J&R owns Joe's music, publishes Joe's music, promotes Joe's gigs, makes Joe's t-shirts, runs Joe's website. "The two of us have committed to this vision," says Roy, "of shoving it up the music industry's ass and fucking showing everybody that they were wrong.

"We don't fuck around," he adds. "I've never lost momentum. Momentum is everything in life, doncha think? I've worked 20 years to get the momentum on my side.

"Are we gonna be millionaires? Yeah – we're gonna be *really* rich. I worked 20 years for this. I was really poor for 20 years, but Joe and I are gonna be really fucking rich. We're talking tens of millions, each. And I'm talking about playing 2,500 seats a night for those numbers to be realised. We don't have to be this fuckin' arena act to be that rich. I'm very proud of that – I was broke for 18 years, dude."

Roy's dad was manager of Frank Sinatra in his later years and executor of his estate when Frank died.

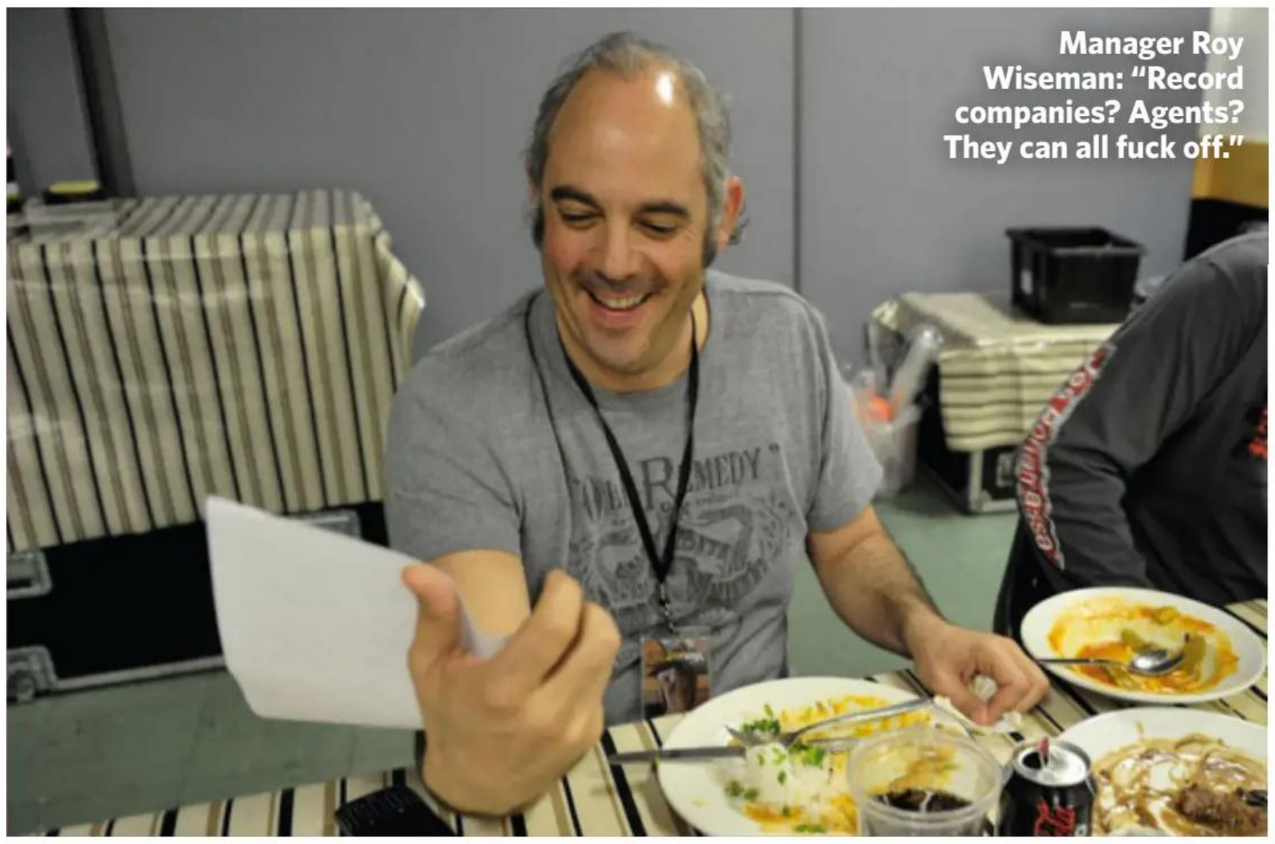
"I grew up on the side of the stage watching Frank Sinatra," says Roy. "I flew in a plane with him, I slept at his house. I travelled with dad from the age of 13 onwards with his acts – from Liza Minnelli to Paul Anka to Sammy Davis and Frank Sinatra – every one of those fucking people have the same quality that Joe has. The stars are the stars."

The story of Joe Bonamassa is also the story of J&R Adventures.

It's the story of how two people took on the music business – the record companies, the agents and the promoters – and won. It's the story of a guy who understood the business of music from an early age (Roy), and a guy who understood music itself (Joe). And it's a story that starts in the late 80s.

While most 15-year-olds hate their parents' music, Joe fell in love with his.

So what did his parents do right? "Every Saturday, my father used to come to me and say, 'Hey, let's listen to some records.' So any



Manager Roy Wiseman: "Record companies? Agents? They can all fuck off."

given Saturday, there would be the Jeff Beck Group's *Truth* playing, or – I call it the 'orange record' [1972's *Jeff Beck Group*] – the one with Bobby Tench and Max Middleton and Clive Chaman, the *Rough And Ready* band with Cozy Powell.

"Another Saturday it'd be *Yessongs* in its entirety or *Thick As A Brick* by Jethro Tull. We'd sit and listen and my father is a good commentator. Think of him as Jackie Stewart watching F-1. He'd take the needle off and say, 'Listen to this part.' And he'd play me the bass part and give me appreciation for not just the guitar-playing, but Rick Wakeman and Bill Bruford and Chris Squire – who's actually become a really good friend and is one of my favourite bass players of all time.

"So it was fun, cos the guitars would come out and you'd just get immersed in this world of discovery and music and guitar playing and before you knew it you'd killed a Saturday without even thinking about it. We listened to everything from Robben Ford, to the various incarnations of Clapton's solo band – the stuff from the 70s, *Behind The Sun*, the Beano album. It was really soup to nuts. So much so that still to this day I still don't really know what is on the radio. I've always detached myself from popular music."

When I heard Free for the first time it was everything I'd ever wanted to hear on a record. It changed my life. I said, 'That's it for me.'

Joe Bonamassa

Every time anyone buys something from Joe's website, Roy gets a text message.

We sit with him in the back of a London cab as text messages arrive: a CD ordered from Holland, a T-shirt from Brighton, a DVD from Sweden. Surely he doesn't need all that coming to his phone every day? "Are you kidding me?" he says. "This is what gets me outta bed in the morning!"

Joe and Roy have a thing they call *The Book Of Joe*.

The Book Of Joe is not an actual book, at least not yet. But it's a metaphorical way of talking about The Bonamassa Story and

"all those moments and the critical people that made a difference in Joe's career". All those moments and people are logged and debts remembered. People who have a special place in *The Book Of Joe*'s early chapters include:

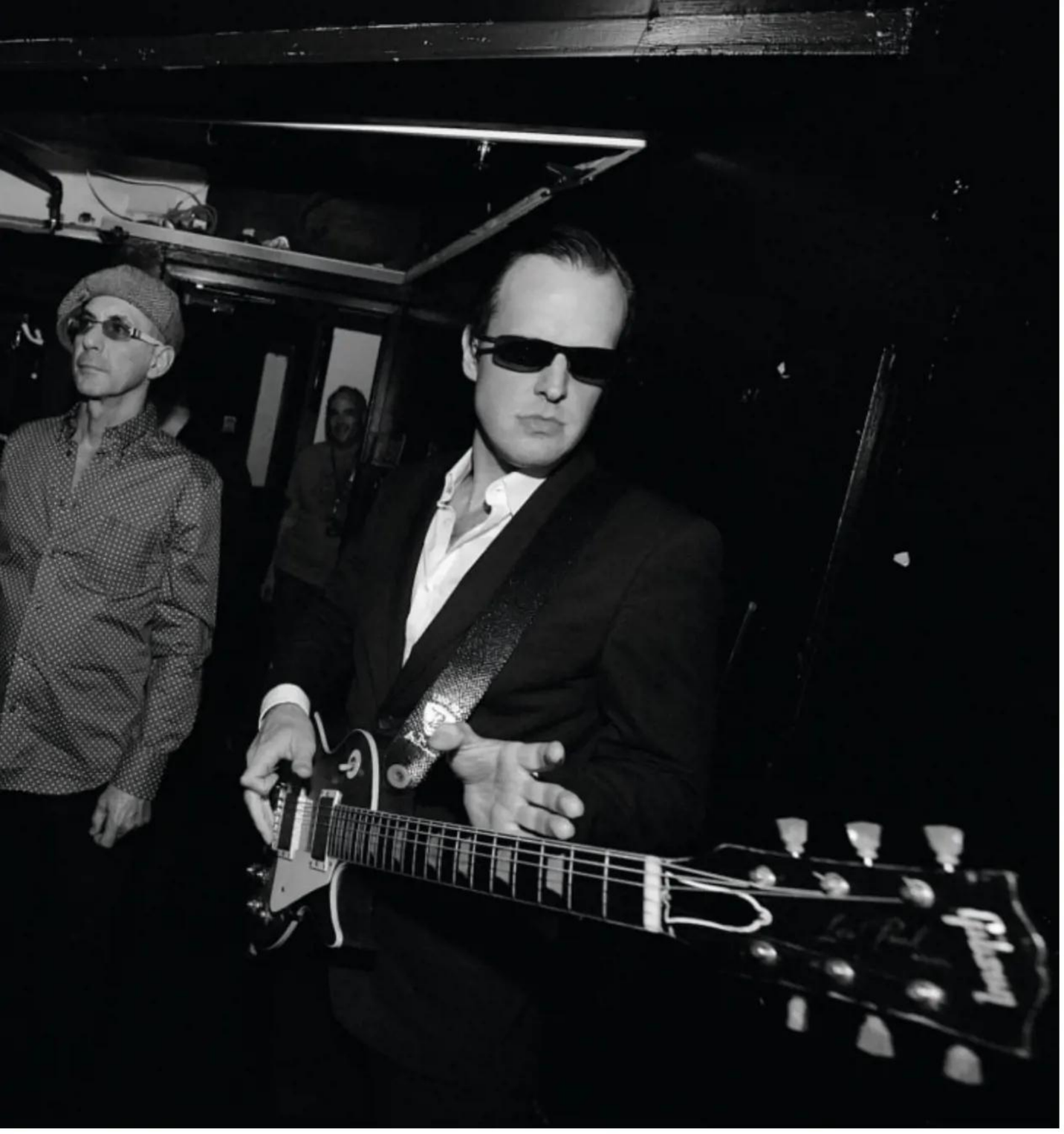
Danny Gatton: a legend in guitar-playing circles, the late Danny Gatton was a jazz/rockabilly/fusion guitar ace who tutored Joe when he was 11.

BB King: Joe supported 'The King of the Blues', aged 12. BB's subsequent comments ("This kid's potential is unbelievable. He hasn't even begun to scratch the surface. He's one of a kind") became a powerful endorsement that opened doors.

Age 14, Joe's first signed band was called Bloodline.

Schooled by his dad, tutored by Danny Gatton, playing live with Gatton and BB King, Bonamassa built up enough of a reputation that he was offered the job as guitar player in Bloodline, a blues rock band made up of the sons of famous musicians. Their drummer was Erin Davis, son of Miles Davis. On rhythm guitar was Waylon Krieger, son of Door Robby Krieger. On bass and vocals was Berry Oakley, Jr. (son of the Allman Brothers' Berry Oakley). Bonamassa was the only one without famous parents (though Allmusic's review of the time noted, 'Joe Bonamassa may not be the progeny of a legend, but he is certainly the prodigy of this group'). Bloodline released one album before splitting in 1995.

Roy Wiseman was Bloodline's manager. He remembers calling Smokin' Joe to tell him: "Bloodline is breaking up. They wanna do other things without you. You know what? Screw them. I'm staying with you. You wanna do jazz, do jazz. You wanna do fusion, do fusion." Joe is 18 by now, just graduating high school (although he has barely *been* at school, having spent his last few years on the road, with two months of 'home schooling' squeezing in a whole year of school work). He sends Roy a tape two weeks later, with a note that says, 'I'm ready. And you know what, here's me trying to sing. Sorry. Hope it's not too bad.' "I put it in the tape player," says Roy, "and… it pretty much sucked. But every now and then there was a vocal moment that was great. And I thought, 'Wow: if he could sing the whole song like that, it would work!' I knew at that moment that I was committed to Joe Bonamassa until I die."



Little known Joey Bones Fact #1: he almost joined UFO. This is *so* little known a fact that even Joe doesn't know it. Back in September or October 1996, Joe was invited to Columbus, Ohio to rehearse with UFO. In Joe's head he was just "filling in on guitar to help audition drummers or something". The drummer that day, Jerry Shirley, remembers things differently:

"Pete [Way, bass] needed a drummer to audition this hot young guitar player to see if he was right for UFO," says Jerry. "I was living in Cleveland working for this radio station 98.5 WNCX Cleveland. I thought Joe was brilliant. I was still running a version of Humble Pie and if we hadn't had such a great lead player at the time I would have probably tried to pinch him…"

Joe turned up with a Flying V having learned *Lights Out* and a handful of other tracks. At the end of the first day, Pete Way changed his life. "Pete turns to me and he says, 'Have you ever heard of a guitar player called Paul Kossoff? Your vibrato reminds me a lot of him.'"

Joe had heard *All Right Now* and thought it was Bad Company, so Pete made him a Free mixtape and on the trip home, with his dad driving, Joe stuck it in the cassette deck. "The first song was *I'm A Mover* – and it was everything I ever wanted to hear on a record. That simple, almost marching, British beat – very 2 and 4 – with space that you could drive a truck through. Simon [Kirke] wasn't filling through every bar like a Mitch Mitchell. Ultimately it changed my life. It was just everything that I always wanted to be when I grew up and I said, 'There ya go. That's all it is for me.'"

(UFO didn't release an album for another four years. When they did, Michael Schenker was back on guitar.)

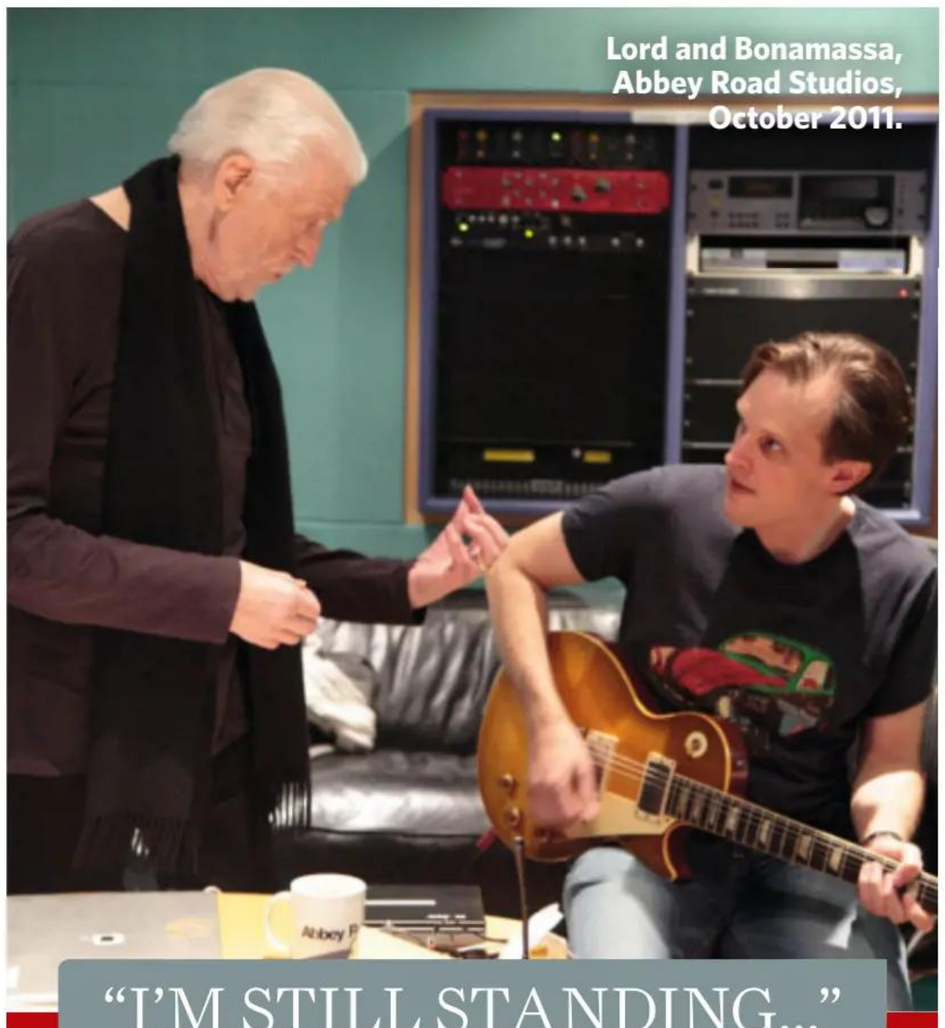
Above: seconds before going on stage at Plymouth, 2011. Left: with early mentor BB King and knocking 'em dead live.

Also named in *The Book Of Joe* (Chapter 2):

Phil Ramone: the legendary producer (Paul Simon, Billy Joel, etc) spotted something in Joe from an early age and, after the collapse of Bloodline, became the first person to offer him a record deal. Sadly, in what would become typical of Bonamassa's experience of record companies, the deal went tits-up: two weeks before he was due to go in the studio, the record company closed.

Michael Caplan: Caplan was one of the few major-label men to ever notice Bonamassa's potential, signing him to Epic records and pairing him up with…

Tom Dowd: the legendary Atlantic record ➔



Lord and Bonamassa, Abbey Road Studios, October 2011.

"I'M STILL STANDING..."

A defiant **Jon Lord** revisits his 1968 classical-rock mash-up.

The most beloved organ player in rock history is in the studio reworking his 1969 classical-rock conceptual mash-up, *Concerto For Group And Orchestra*. *Classic Rock* was lucky enough to sit in on a session at Abbey Road as Joe Bonamassa laid down guitar parts to Bruce Dickinson's vocals and the sounds of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

They're joined by Lord's regular singers Steve Balsamo and Kasia Laska, former Pink Floyd man Guy Pratt on bass, the "unsung but utterly brilliant" Brett Morgan on drums and "this young kid Jon Lord on the organ" – and a guest guitarist yet to be confirmed (though Lord has said that it won't be Ritchie Blackmore, before that rumour takes hold).

"The first movement is the battle btween the orchestra and the band – not really a concerto, more of a sparring match. The second movement they try getting it together and we end up with this wonderful confluence of blues and the orchestra. And then the third movement, which is the fast and furious finale, is a kind of celebration of the fact that we've played together."

Was his original idea to bring the two worlds together?

"Well, yes it was my thing, but shortly after that I went into the studio and played the organ solo on *Hard Loving Man*! I mean, dammit, I love my rock'n'roll. I used to fling that Hammond around the stage like a being possessed. I wasn't trying to preach, I wasn't an educator – I'm an entertainer. I just wanted to make a glorious noise. It says in the original sleevenotes: 'It's only supposed to be fun.' But everybody took it so sodding seriously."

Lord himself has been battling serious illness, in the form of cancer. The day we see him, he's full of life: clearly thinner, but still the charming, wisecracking, passionate musician he's always been.

"I'm doing alright," he says. "I don't want to pre-empt because God's always listening but I think I've got the bastard beat. I've had some very encouraging results. Chemo is hell. But what's that Elton John song? I'm still standing."

producer who produced Bonamassa's first album. Dowd was then in his 70s. "But as old as he was, he was *young*," says Wiseman. "And as young as Joe was, he was *old*. Those guys were like two peas in a pod."

By 1999 Bonmassa had learned to sing, got himself a major label and had one of the all-time great producers as a mentor. He's in the studio with Tom Dowd making demos for Sony. "I didn't have any experience of singing in the studio," says Joe, "I'm just shouting in key. But Tom's very good. And I spent almost two years with him putting songs together. The two months that we did the record was like a four-year Masters degree in music, recording, history – and how to be when you're that accomplished.

"We'd get a lot of studio engineers coming in. They didn't give a shit about me – they all wanted to meet Tom. They'd be asking him about *Otis Blue* or the Cream sessions, Derek And The Dominoes or Aretha Franklin. And Tom would say to them: 'You know how you record Aretha Franklin? Here's the secret. Put a microphone in front of her. She does the rest.'"

The album *A New Day Yesterday* was the last album Dowd ever finished. He died in 2002 from emphysema. "He was like a family member by the end," says Joe. "And I miss him dearly and one day, when we have free time, I wanna go back and mix *A New Day Yesterday* and I'd like to re-sing it and dedicate it to him. Because I feel now, at 34 years old, that I'm just ready to work with someone of that calibre…"

Maria Carey's ex fucked Joe's shit up.
With solo debut, *A New Day Yesterday*, in the bag, it looks like the future is rosy for Joe and Roy. Sony get excited about the album and start talking about how they hear a 'radio hit'. And then – for the first time under head honcho Tommy Mottola – Sony reports a loss. The news affects the business from top to tail. Sony claws back the money through cut-backs and taking fewer risks. "They went from excited to shit," is how Roy remembers it. "The report came out September 15th, our record was coming out October 30th, and everything dried up, cash just disappeared, and all of a sudden no-one wanted to touch us at Sony."

"If only this was in bullet points…" Joe catches up on his reading.

FAR RIGHT: ROSS HALFIN

The birth of J&R Adventures.
Their plans had been scuppered by other musicians in Bloodline, and then screwed by the business operations of two different record companies. So Joe and Roy decided to do things for themselves.

"We started putting out Joe Bonamassa records under J&R Adventures from that point onwards," says Roy. "By this point I was 33 and I knew enough to know that it wasn't rocket science. We could go in to this little world called blues that the record companies didn't give a shit about and we could be a big fish in a small pond."

They built their company on a few staunch principles:

1. No one tells them what records to make. "I realised that we were never gonna get on radio," says Roy, "so fuck the idea of making a record to get airplay. Never have I asked Joe to make a record for that reason. As a matter of fact, I said, 'Here's the deal: you make the records, and I'll market them. Nobody tells you how to make your records.' And no one's told him how to make a record since. He makes his own records. I don't hear the records until they're virtually done. There's no A&R man, just him and Kevin Shirley. No one asks to hear a fuckin' song until it's done. We call it church and state. He's the church and I'm the state. He doesn't fuck with this and I don't fuck with that – it's a perfect marriage."

2. They are partners in everything. They reinvested everything they made back into J&R. They're in it together. What's good for Joe is good for Roy, and vice-versa. "We can have a board meeting for our company and there's just the two of us," says Joe. "It's efficient. Record companies became so large they were like cruise ships on a Formula-1 track. Sometimes you need to make a decision like, 'Hey, we're supposed to be in Berlin, but there's something we gotta do in Hamburg, can we re-route everybody?' With a record company it would take a board meeting and you'd never get it done."

3. They are an holistic enterprise: every part of the operation benefits the others. By taking on every aspect of Bonamassa's business, they are strong in a way that the separate fields of record company, merchandiser, promoter and agent are not. "I understood early on that the record industry is not the concert or performance industry," says Roy, "they're actually completely apart. They don't work together. They have separate agendas and I realised that what we were doing was outside the scope of what they could understand in this day and age and I said, 'Fuck it, I'm gonna show them.'"

Record companies became so large they were like cruise ships on a Formula-1 track. With just the two of us it's so much more efficient.
Joe Bonamassa

Also named in *The Book Of Joe* (Chapter 3):

George Thorogood: The blues-rock good-guy gave Bonamassa many support slots and along the way, says Joe, "He taught me how to tour."

Jethro Tull: "My first tour on *A New Day Yesterday* [named after and featuring the Tull song of the same name], was with Jethro Tull. Ian [Anderson] would come out every night and help sort out the sound. I mean, we were three guys in a van – he didn't have to do that."

Carmine Rojas: Bonamassa bassist and band leader since 2006. Carmine played for David Bowie and Rod Stewart and was once part of a crew of session musicians that would be called in to secretly fix other people's records when the act couldn't nail it. He once 'fixed' someone's record so well that their bassist later won 'Bass Player Of The Year' in some musician's mag.

Kevin Shirley: Producer of all Joe's music since 2006. Back then, after a series of competent-but-unremarkable albums including 2003's *Blues Deluxe*, Bonamassa was in danger of becoming 'just another blues guitarist', lost in a sea of Kenny Wayne Shepherds and Jeff Healeys. And then Shirley came along. "I didn't sell my soul for Jack's three magic beans," says Joe. "What I did do is find

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a producer in Kevin Shirley who consciously tried to airlift me out of the three-verses-and-a 20-minute-solo thing, and go 'I'm gonna challenge you.'"

We need to talk about Kevin.

"I do the playing, Roy runs the business side and Kevin really is the third part," says Bonamassa. "It's hard to quantify the contributions of a guy like Kevin Shirley. When I first met him I was doing 200 or 300 – maybe 500 seats in Europe, tops. Tonight [in Plymouth] is the smallest English show at 2,500. And this is in seven years and seven albums. He stresses the songs, he stresses the creativity, he also stresses the performance of the band and having the right band. Not only is he one of my best friends in the world, he's like a member of the family.

"Of all the people and producers that I've sat and talked with about music, the guy that I equate on an equal playing field with Tom Dowd is Kevin. As far as being a deep musical guy, being the best musician in the room, and also seeing the entire record before it's done, that's Kevin."

"I first saw Joe at a small blues club in St. Charles, Illinois," says Shirley. "There were 200 people there and I actually didn't think

ROSS HALFIN

anyone named Bonamassa could have any success. But I went so I could meet a girl – who later became my wife. I was impressed with his obvious talent, but thought there was limited scope for a bar-band blues guitarist. So I went to see him on his bus after the show…"

"He comes on the bus," says Joe, "and he goes, 'I dig your tone – but the band's gotta go. The songs need work and – I'll tell you this – if you want to make the same old blues record that everyone else is making out there, I'm not your guy. But if you want to do something different and really challenge yourself and get really creative about it…'

"He'd said the magic words: 'different', 'challenge', 'creative'. Cos I was stuck in a rut: 'Do I do more of this, more of that?' *Blues Deluxe,* Vol 2?" Three months later he was Shirley's studios in Las Vegas.

"Jason Bonham walks in, he thinks I'm the tech. I'm in a sweatshirt, I'm over-weight, got the long hair. Rick [Melick, Joe's keyboard player from that day to this] walks in, then Carmine [Rojas, bassist and musical director from that day to this]. We don't get two minutes into the conversation and it's, 'OK, let's play! *So Many Roads.*' 'What key's it in?' I say, 'I think that's a little high.' Kevin says, 'Don't be lazy.' Thirty minutes later we had a track."

"The *You And Me* album had a tiny budget," says Kevin, "and actually cost me about $20,000 to make! But what an investment in someone who's since become one of my best friends."

Smokin' Joe: live in Plymouth, above, and at home in LA, left.

Kevin Shirley said, 'If you want to make the same old blues record as everyone else, I'm not your guy.' He'd said the magic words.
Joe Bonamassa

You And Me earned Bonamassa a feature in *Classic Rock* in 2006 and two of its tracks, including an apocalyptic version of Zeppelin's *Tea For One,* ended up on our free CDs that year. He was on the map.

Little known Joey Bones Fact #2: He's got some pair of balls.
Back in 2009, when he won the Breakthrough Award at the Classic Rock Roll Of Honour, Joe Bonmassa got on stage and played by himself in front of an audience that included Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Tony Iommi, Slash, Joe Perry, Pete Townshend, Brian May, Billy Gibbons and more. Afterwards Doc McGhee said that Joe had "some pair of fuckin' balls" to get up and play before that audience.

"I get a lot of credit for that gig," laughs Joe. "But I didn't know they were there! The only person I knew was there was Tony Iommi, who I have the utmost respect for as a guitar player, but I'm coming from a different genre, so I was like, 'If he doesn't get what I do, I get it.' Because of where we were sitting I didn't see Slash and Beck and Page and everybody. When Doc McGhee said that, I was like, 'I'm glad I know this now…' But if I'd known before?" He shakes his head.

While Kevin Shirley gave his music a make-over, Joe's image changed too.
He got fat. "He was a fat fucking slob," says Wiseman with characteristic honesty. "Joe has come to understand that image is really important. He works really hard at not eating."

"I gained a bunch of weight moving to California," says Joe. "I got fat on success. When I lived in New York I didn't have any money for food so I didn't eat. But then you start to have a hundred bucks in your pocket and you take a girl out for dinner and then, 'Let's have another one – I made some more money.' So I ended up getting fat on the little success I had. I thought I was Mr Cool. I was playing blues. I was in a tour bus, didn't have to drive so I could have a drink after the show, could eat whatever I wanted, I was carefree. But you can only blame the dry-cleaners for shrinking your stuff so many times before you have to look at yourself."

As he piled on the pounds, he also took to the stage in the same clothes he wore during the day. "I'd go out in the same jeans and whatever shoes I was wearing and a collared shirt, the buttons like lethal weapons, hanging on for dear life, titanium thread…"

And so, Joe ballooned into Slobamassa, until Kevin Shirley came to see him at a big moment in his career: his first time headlining a House Of Blues. "He was overweight, which didn't bother me," says Shirley, "but he was dressed in baggy jeans, a dirty plaid shirt, baseball cap and sneakers. Basically what he had been wearing all day, except for the little wraparound sunglasses he wears at the gig.

"I sent him an email saying, 'Joe, you look like a slob!' I said that if he wanted to be a blues artist, he should respect the genre – that BB King, and Albert and Freddie King – Muddy Waters and even Howlin' Wolf and SRV – always looked like they dressed to impress…"

"I took offence," says Joe. "I go, 'Kevin, I spent good money on that shirt – it's Hugo Boss!' He says, 'I don't care – it looks like shit!' Then I got really sick doing a tour here in the UK in early 2008…"

He lost 20 pounds in three weeks, bought a nice suit for a gig in Paris and when he saw pictures later, realised that he was on to something. Now he's suited and booted for every gig. "TK Maxx is your friend," he smiles. "There's a side of you that thinks, 'Who do you think you *are?*' But you look at pictures of Muddy Waters in the 60s and those guys were styled. I always said, I have to be dressed better than the people who come to see me.

"Some bands, that's their thing. I don't think Wilco's gig would go down as well if they all shaved and wore tuxedos. Jeff Tweedy – he is that cat with the jean coat and the stubble. He wears it on stage and he wears it off stage and that's who he is. For me, that's really who I am *on stage* – I like a show to be a big event."

The Roy Wiseman guide to why promoters, record companies and agents are "fucking idiots":
In Britain, J&R Adventures use a promoter (the Gig Cartel) and agent Neil O'Brien ("I call him an entrepreneurial agent and I separate him from the pack," says Roy). But in much of Europe and the entire United States they don't. Why? "The marketplace dictates that typically an artist like Joe would end up playing blues clubs and

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festivals where tickets are 50 per cent or less of what mainstream ticket prices would be. So I decided we had to take control of that…"

What Roy did was to tell promoters that he wanted to charge $40 a ticket, instead of $18. When promoters huffed and puffed that "no one pays that for blues acts", Roy said: "Fuck you. This is the Rolls-Royce of blues acts." And then he hired the halls himself and charged $40. He took his fate into his own hands and the job of manager, agent and promoter folded into one.

"Why should Coldplay be able to go in and get the top ticket price but Joe Bonamassa can't?" he says. "Why? Who says? I say bullshit and I'm going to fucking show why that's not true. The promoters don't get – and the reason is that they don't smell it, they sell it."

But aren't the promoters supposed to be the experts on how many tickets an act can sell? "They're not experts," spits Roy, "they're full of shit. They know the obvious. To me, promoters are picking stocks based on yesterday's news. And that's why you hear that classic fuckin' story: 'Oh man, on X, Y & Z's show, I just lost a fortune – I paid 'em top dollar and the last tour was great and then – boom.' He's lost half a million. Same with the agencies. I feel bad for any act that's with a booking agency, I really do. Because they get nothing for paying 10 per cent. Fucking nothing. Most managers have no clue about what the fuck they're doing either. I mean, you wanna talk about it? I don't care. I'm an independent island – they can all fuck off, everyone of them. Because the truth of the matter is that I rent every theatre myself. So Live Nation is gonna stop me? I don't need an agent *because* I rent every theatre myself. I put out my own records, so is Sony gonna stop me? I mean, they're fucking idiots, everyone of them."

How Joe survives his touring regime:

"Imagine you took your entire house every day, put everything you own on wheels, packed it up, put it on a truck, went 200 miles down the road, unpacked, lived in it for a day, and then packed it all up and did it again. That's essentially what it is. If you make it easy on yourself then the burnout is less. I mean, we go out for dinner on our days off, but nobody's out 'til 2 o'clock in the morning. At least, none of the band; I dunno about the crew. There's no way you can sustain a career, year after year, if you're like, 'I'll take the whiskey flight!'

"We'll have a bit of wine at the end of the gig, and have a laugh, it's not like we're passing round echinacea shots and showing each other yoga moves, but there's no drugs out here, none of that clichéd burn-out stuff, cos I could see very quickly what that'd do. And what's the top price here tonight, £50? Those people deserve the best show, at least the same show the guys in Cardiff got. So if we'd gone out last night and fell asleep on Plymouth rock… It's bad for the show."

Three albums in 2011. Three or four in 2012. Doesn't Joe Bonamassa put out too much material?

"Joe's put out an album a year, virtually – every 12-15 months – since we left Sony. People have said to me along the way, 'Don't you guys put out too much material? Don't you want to leave more time for that one to sell?' This is how we do it and why: if you can't get airplay, your record is only current for about 10 seconds. You get press for 30-60 days, then it's done. Then Joe would go to the clubs and do his thing. When you go back to the clubs a year later and you've got the same record out, what do the local free music papers have to write about? Nothing. And so they won't cover you.

"So if you can't get airplay to sustain a record for 24-36 months – which became the normal cycle inbetween records, based on the recording industry's point of view – you have to do something else. When you look at the old school, in the 60s and 70s, they used to pump out records by the month, twice a year if it was a hot artist, every year – but they wouldn't wait 'til every three years. So the thought was, well, fuck it, if we can't get radio we'll keep putting out a new record a year so that I can keep having a new discussion with the media. By doing that, and keeping Joe on the road from year to year, that's how we did this without having any radio, TV, or any major media working for us. How else could you do it?"

So… who *is* Joe Bonmassa?

"At the end of the day," he says, "my story is… Whatever people told you you had to be in order to get the key to the men's club of rock'n'roll guitar, chances are there's another way to do it. And chances are there is something that you're missing. I can put it in terms of boxing. There are boxers that have a 57-0 record, make it look easy, knock everybody out. They're mysterious, they're feared and stuff like that. Then there's cats that come up, get knocked out a couple of times, but knock some other people out, have a win record, but lose some here or there – they're a people's champion.

"My fans want to see me become successful, they make it a mission in their own personal lives. They take boxes of flyers and go out and put them on cars, y'know? And it's because when you're sick and it's raining and it's windy and it's cold and you can't be bothered and there's five people outside the bus – you don't walk past them. You get sick and you get rained on and you take the wind and you sign everything and you take pictures and you repeat that about 50,000 times – and that's building your house.

"And you never take anybody for granted."

The people's champion: Joe meets his people. "Never take anyone for granted."

> **We have some wine at the end of a gig – it's not like we're passing round echinacea shots and showing each other yoga moves...**
> **Joe Bonamassa**

You can read more from Joe Bonamassa, and his bandmates in Black Country Communion – bassist/vocalist Glenn Hughes, drummer Jason Bonham and keyboard player Derek Sherinian – in the cover feature of issue 241 of Classic Rock.

First Time I Met The Blues

Mountain man **Leslie West** recalls inspiration, amputation and the revelation of watching Cream on LSD.

Words: **Henry Yates**

Back in 1969, Leslie West's girth inspired the name of anvil-heavy New York power-trio Mountain – and four decades later, the guitarist remains larger than life. Batting back our questions with a gruff wit undimmed by the amputation of his lower right leg in 2011, and insisting he's in the game until he drops, it's easy to read the title of new album *Still Climbing* as a statement of intent. "I'm gonna be 68 in a month," drawls West, with palpable satisfaction, "and I'm still playing the damn guitar."

Do you remember how you fell for the blues?
Yeah, listening to Eric Clapton. Plain and simple. God, I listened to that Bluesbreakers album over and over again. It was John Mayall's group, but I was more interested in Clapton. Wow. I'd never heard anybody play guitar like that. He played so differently at the beginning, in Bluesbreakers and Cream. I'd say Clapton and Jimi Hendrix are the guys that made me want to play.

What was the best blues concert you saw growing up?
Well, after we heard Cream, my brother and I went to see them play at the Village Theater in New York, which became the Fillmore. It was their first or second tour of America. We took LSD. The curtain opened up and I heard *Sunshine Of Your Love* and I looked at my brother and said, 'Holy shit, we really need to practise!'

Which of the 'three Kings' is your favourite?
Albert King. In fact, the first Mountain show we did, at the Fillmore West, was opening for Johnny Winter and Albert King. Albert King's amps didn't work and he had to use mine, and I don't think he had a very good experience with them. I didn't talk to him that night, I was too nervous and it was our first show, but I loved his style. He could take the same lick and bend it 40 different ways. I just seemed to like his style more than Freddie King, Buddy Guy, B.B. King… Albert was my favourite.

Who's the most impressive blues musician you've ever seen in the flesh?
Joe Bonamassa. He played with me on my last album, *Unusual Suspects*, and I played with him on a song from his first album called *If Heartaches Were Nickels*, written by Warren Haynes. And yeah, he's something else. He's from upstate New York, and he knows the blues like he was an old man playing it.

Johnny Winter is a guest on *Busted, Disgusted Or Dead*. What was that like?
You can really tell the difference when he starts to play. It's Johnny Winter all the way. He's got that Texas style. We've been really good friends a long time. We had a problem a long time ago, both of us, from doing heroin. And then we both went on methadone, and I found a great way to detox from it, but Johnny still had a problem. We played together in Canada, and his manager asked me how I did it, so I told him. And it worked for both of us. I think we're gonna do a book about it, because nobody's done a book about methadone, which is a very serious drug.

Jonny Lang also appears on one track…
Well, I interviewed Jonny about 12 years ago, after his first album, for a guitar magazine. He was playing New Jersey on tour with Buddy Guy and he had a day off, so we played and sang together in the control room, and it turned out really good, man. Besides his guitar playing, there's something about Jonny's voice that just gets me. Boy, he plays like an old blues guy from Muscle Shoals, Alabama. He's got it going on.

> **"I heard *Sunshine Of Your Love* and said to my brother, 'Holy shit, we need to practise!'"**

Have you ever had the blues in your life?
The hardest time was two years ago when I lost my leg. I don't know how I came back from that. My wife, Jenni, saved my life. We were going to Biloxi, Mississippi. Mountain was playing our last show. I got a blood clot on the plane. When I got to Mississippi, my leg didn't feel right. I went to hospital and they put me in a coma for four days. Eventually, they had to amputate my leg. They had to wake me up from the coma, and Jenni said, 'Either they amputate your leg or you're gonna die.' I just said, 'Do whatever you have to do.' It's a good thing it wasn't my arm. I wouldn't be talking to you now.

Did you consider stepping back from the business?
Well, I'd just finished doing *Unusual Suspects*. We have this thing over here called Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp, so I did it in New York, and when I heard the guitar it got me all excited again. It's a little difficult. I'm not really using a prosthetic. My balance is a little fucked-up, but I'm doing the best I can.

If you sold your soul to the Devil, how much would you charge for it?
Heh heh. I'll sell it to him for five bucks!